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CATHOLICISM IN THE FICTION OF GRAHAM GREENE

by



WILLIAM ANTHONY BECKLES

A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

The personal beliefs of any writer undoubtedly affect his art. So too will his religion -- if he has any. Graham Greene, unlike writers such as Camus, Beckett or Sartre, would agree with Hamlet that

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.

For Greene is a Roman Catholic, and much of his work is concerned with the presentation of Christian themes. In defiance of a century characterized largely by a loss of faith in traditional religion, Greene's work shows the presence of God as a factor in human affairs. Greene thus allies himself with the supporters of the traditional Christian point of view -- for example, Eliot and Mauriac.

This thesis is concerned primarily with the religious element in Greene's fiction. Delineating a method of approach to Greene, the first three chapters discuss religion and literature; Greene's vision of life; and the presence of the religious element in Greene's work, traced in a chronological fashion. The following four chapters are analyses of the four novels of the "Catholic cycle" -- Brighton Rock, The Power and The Glory, The Heart of The Matter, The End of The Affair -- in which Greene probes the subjects of evil, martyrdom, pity and sanctity. The Quiet American and A Burnt-Out Case are not specifically Catholic in orientation, but they do have religious overtones, and are therefore germane to the thesis. The penultimate chapter



contains a discussion of two of Greene's plays, The Living Room and The Potting Shed, specifically from a theological point of view.

This thesis attempts to portray Greene's mingling of faith and fiction, and to evaluate whether the fusion succeeds or not.

Consequently, part of the discussion has of necessity to centre around an examination of the responsibilities and duties of a novelist who also happens to be a Roman Catholic; and I have chronicled my unease at some aspects of Greene's use of religion in his fiction.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

T.S. Eliot has written that "literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint."<sup>1</sup> In making such a statement, Eliot obviously disagrees with the tenets of any type of criticism, which would claim that the critic should be concerned with the purely literary values of the work under discussion. For a literary work is a construct of form and matter: and if a critic were merely to explore a book as though it were a collection of words on paper (dealing solely with structural arrangement, tone, symbolism and so on), then he would not be fulfilling his function as a critic. The critic, says Eliot, "is not merely a technical expert, who has learned the rules to be observed by the writers he criticizes: the critic must be the whole man, a man of convictions and principles, and of knowledge and experience of life."<sup>2</sup>

Graham Greene agrees with Eliot, and a look at his essays on Henry James, Charles Dickens or Francois Mauriac shows that his criticism has a distinctly religious orientation. Greene finds in James "a religious sense"<sup>3</sup> which Dickens does not have: "[The] world of Dickens is a world without God; and as a substitute for the power and the glory of the omnipotent and the omniscient are a few sentimental references to heaven, angels, the sweet faces of the dead, and Oliver



saying, 'Heaven is a long way off, and they are too happy there to come down to the bedside of a poor boy.' In this Manichaean world we can believe in evil-doing, but goodness wilts into philanthropy, kindness, and those strange vague sicknesses into which Dickens's young women so frequently fall and which seem in his eyes a kind of badge of virtue, as though there were a merit in death."<sup>4</sup> Greene praises Mauriac as "a writer for whom the visible world has not ceased to exist, whose characters have the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose,"<sup>5</sup> and laments that

with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper-thin. Even in one of the most materialistic of our great novelists -- in Trollope -- we are aware of another world against which the actions of the characters are thrown into relief. The ungainly clergyman picking his black-booted way through the mud, handling so awkwardly his umbrella, speaking of his miserable income and stumbling through a proposal of marriage, exists in a way that Mrs Woolf's Mr Ramsay never does, because we are aware that he exists not only to the woman he is addressing but also in God's eye. His unimportance in the world of the senses is only matched by his enormous importance in another world.<sup>6</sup>

Both Greene and Eliot, like their medieval counterparts, refuse to separate content from the verbal construct. Dante, for example, in writing his Divine Comedy, points out that the poem is susceptible to literal, allegorical or moral, and anagogical interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Dante was a product of the Middle Ages, and the pervasive character of the Middle Ages was its Catholicity. As a result, literary works of the period are an expression of that Catholic culture. Thus, one can hardly understand the works of Chaucer, Langland or Dante



without some knowledge of the religion which shaped their culture, and the most simple of medieval lyrics may have a content which the modern reader may miss. Similarly, if one is to understand the works of Spenser or Milton, one must have more than a nodding acquaintance with Protestant theology. The origin of English drama is itself a religious phenomenon, coming as it does from the miracle and morality plays of the Church.

The terms religion and religious literature need definition. Reinhardt points out that "the ultimate source of human thinking and doing and therefore of all mental dispositions and attitudes is always either in the positive or in the negative sense colored by religious convictions. Religion understood in this broadest sense determines either positively or negatively the idea which man forms of life and reality. In affirmation or denial, man's convictions concerning the meaning of existence as such are radically transformed."<sup>8</sup>

Reinhardt goes on to quote Tertullian to the effect that every human being, insofar as he has standards of good and evil, is an anima naturaliter Christiana.<sup>9</sup> This is obviously the case with Camus, who while neither accepting nor rejecting Christianity, nevertheless wrote some profoundly interesting works of literature which remain susceptible to an interpretation from a religious and specifically Christian point of view: The Plague, with its multi-layered symbolism, is a case in point.

A religious work implies the existence of the supernatural. It can be either positive, where "god or gods appear visually,



auditorily, tactilely, or as hidden but logical certain manipulators of events"<sup>10</sup> as in Graham Greene, or Mauriac; or it can be negative, as in the obscure parables of Kafka, riddled as they are with ambiguity and pessimism.

The religious writer can employ his talents in basically two ways. He can become a propagandist whose main function will be to turn out defences for his faith, in which case he will no longer be an artist, but an apologist. As Greene observed in an interview, the novelist "isn't writing a moral treatise, that isn't his purpose. If it were, he wouldn't write a novel and he wouldn't be a novelist."<sup>11</sup> Greene is also on record as declaring that "literature has nothing to do with edification."<sup>12</sup> The alternative is to remain a writer who will use the Christian faith as a framework or structure, while at the same time remaining true to one's art. To put it another way, the problem of the Christian novelist is simply that of "reconciling his religious and didactic premises to the realistic and empirical principles of the novel form."<sup>13</sup> How is this reconciliation to be brought about, since, as some critics assert, the Christian faith is a limiting factor on the novelist, confining him to the rigid bounds of orthodoxy? Greene claims the right to be disloyal, if the need arises, since "disloyalty encourages us to roam experimentally through any human mind; it gives to the novelist the extra dimension of sympathy."<sup>14</sup> Flannery O'Connor, another Catholic novelist, puts the problem this way:



The novelist is required to open his eyes on the world around him and look. If what he sees is not highly edifying, he is still required to look. Then he is required to reproduce, with words, what he sees. Now this is the first point at which the novelist who is a Catholic may feel some friction between what he is supposed to do as a novelist and what he is supposed to do as a Catholic, for what he sees at all times is fallen man perverted by false philosophies. Is he to reproduce this? Or is he to change what he sees and make it, instead of what it is, what in the light of faith he thinks it ought to be? Is he, as Baron von Hugel has said, supposed to "tidy up reality?"

Just how can the novelist be true to time and eternity both, to what he sees and what he believes, to the relative and the absolute? And how can he do all this and be true at the same time to the art of the novel, which demands the illusion of life?<sup>15</sup>

The problem is complicated by the fact that the Christian writer of this century is discoursing to the Gentiles, to an audience which is not disbelieving so much as indifferent. What does a society which has retreated from Christianity, a society of

decent Godless people:  
Their only monument the asphalt road  
And a thousand lost golf balls<sup>16</sup>

care about God or the devil, or about good and evil? In Brighton Rock, Greene uses Ida Arnold as both character and symbol, a metaphor for Eliot's "decent Godless people."

Carl Becker aptly sums up for us the spirit of the age, when he says that

it is still quite impossible for us to regard man as the child of God for whom the earth was created as a temporary habitation. Rather we must regard him as little more than a chance deposit on the surface of the world, carelessly thrown up between two ice ages by the same forces that rust iron and ripen corn, a sentient organism endowed by some happy or unhappy accident with intelligence indeed, but with an intelligence that is conditioned by the very forces that it seeks to understand and to control.<sup>17</sup>

And Eliot bemoans the fact that "the whole of modern literature is



corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern."<sup>18</sup>

From Arnold, in the last century, who saw the sea of faith on the ebb, to the writers of today, we find few certitudes left. Instead of the presence of God, we are presented with the absence of God, the deus absconditus who made the universe and then withdrew from it. Nausea and Angst are the key words of today, and man is represented as abandoned. There are, of course, in contradistinction to a Sartre or a Camus, writers like Eliot and Greene who go against the prevailing zeitgeist; Eliot is a religious poet who proceeds by "hints and guesses," and his Murder in the Cathedral may well be considered a modern passion play, The Cocktail Party treats of the quest for sanctity, and The Family Reunion is a story of "sin and expiation," as Aunt Agatha observes.

To reiterate, the two problems of the Christian novelist are, first, the indifference of his audience, and second, the tensions generated when art comes into conflict with faith. He usually attempts to overcome the first by employing what Flannery O'Connor calls the shock technique -- "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures";<sup>19</sup> indeed, the novelist may be forced to "resort to violent literary means to get his vision across to a hostile audience, and the images and actions he creates may seem distorted and exaggerated"<sup>20</sup> to the reader. Greene



uses violence, the seedy and the grotesque as metaphors for the condition of man fallen away from God. The second problem is solved by a process of schematization. The framework of Christian doctrine (Heaven and Hell, Original Sin, the Last Judgment), provides a loose scaffolding for the novelist. That the framework provides flexibility instead of rigidity can be seen in the fiction of Greene -- Pinkie and Major Scobie may by the laws of the Church deserve Hell, but Greene does not moralize in the two novels by telling us that they are there. He leaves the issue in doubt. To tell the reader firmly that they are in Hell would be artistically bad and morally injudicious, since the matter must be left to the final critic and judge, God.

A third problem facing the Christian novelist, which arises out of problem two, is his choice of subject matter. When the novelist, in realistic terms, describes sin, he faces the reproaches of the righteous Christian reader who reads for edification and moral uplift. Newman long ago realized that this cry for a "pure" Christian literature could not be satisfied. Literature, Newman pointed out, is concerned with man, and since man "is sure to sin [then] his literature will be the expression of his sin" --

I say, from the nature of the case, if Literature is to be made a study of human nature, you cannot have a Christian Literature. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man. You may gather together something very great and high, something higher than any Literature ever was; and when you have done so, you will find that it is not literature at all. You will have simply left the delineation of man, as such, and have substituted for it, as far as you have had anything to substitute, that of man as he is or might be, under certain special advantages.<sup>21</sup>



If, as Newman points out, one equates Christian literature with sinless literature, then by definition a Christian literature could never be written. For to decide that Christian literature must be sinless is to insist that literature must be edifying and must consist of fine sentiments.

Another problem facing the Christian novelist is how to deal adequately with the encounter between God and man. His task is to make this believable to a skeptical reading public. Subsidiary to this, is how to reveal the presence of grace in man's life. Greene's novels, especially The End of the Affair, are attempts to do both; but critics detect artistic flaws when Greene attempts to delineate the presence of grace. Zabel says that in Greene, grace is a kind of deus ex machina, it is the reserve "ace up his sleeve."<sup>22</sup>

Granted that a writer has a Christian vision, does this necessarily make him a better writer than a non-Christian novelist? Obviously the impact his faith makes on him will be evident in an author's work; but whether such work is better, only the stringent canons of literary taste and the stern discipline of criticism will be what matters. Turnell declares, rightly, that belief is no substitute for talent; "but, given the talent, Christians have argued that a writer's creative ability will be nourished and strengthened, his range broadened and deepened by a firmly grounded system of belief."<sup>23</sup> O'Connor similarly agrees that belief should "enlarge, not narrow, [the writer's] field of vision."<sup>24</sup>



The problem for the reader or critic of such a novel, is of course, how to evaluate it, and by what standards? Pius XII stresses that the critic "must honestly interpret what is honestly written," and should criticize, in the words of Tacitus, sine ira et studio.<sup>25</sup> Mooney suggests that the critic first of all define the writer's vision, and then proceed to analyze the way in which this vision is realized in his work. One should above all distinguish between literary criticism and theological argument.<sup>26</sup> This is the method through which I intend to approach Graham Greene, and to explore his use of Catholicism in his fiction. Greene has disclaimed the title of "Catholic novelist," but this disclaimer need not be taken into account since he has not defined what he means by "Catholic novelist." He says, "I would claim not to be a writer of Catholic novels, but a writer who in four or five books took characters with Catholic ideas for his material."<sup>27</sup>

Before proceeding any further, some definition of the term "Catholic novel" must be attempted -- to find out, if possible, what it is, and if Greene's work comes under this category.

The term cries aloud for some final definition, since there are as many definitions, at the moment, as there are people defining it. Sister Mariella Gable, for instance, says Catholic fiction "includes . . . all ethical problems, upon which the Church has no monopoly whatsoever; but these problems become Catholic when treated from a God-centered point of view."<sup>28</sup> This definition, willy-nilly, would probably make Anthony Trollope into a Catholic novelist, which



he obviously is not.

Barbara Nauer Folk declares that "the Catholic element need be no more than the acknowledgment that there is divine activity in human affairs."<sup>29</sup> This definition would apply to Waugh's Brideshead Revisited; Waugh himself declares that the novel is an attempt to trace "the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse . . . characters."<sup>30</sup> But the definition would equally apply to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a book Catholic neither in tone nor intention.

The august Cardinal Newman does not help very much either. Newman remarks that a "reasonable person" means by "Catholic literature," merely "works of Catholics."<sup>31</sup> Non-Catholics therefore cannot write "Catholic literature." Newman claims, for example, that "English literature will ever have been Protestant," and cites Swift and Addison, Hooker and Milton, and other non-Roman Catholic authors to prove his point.<sup>32</sup> But if a Catholic literature can be written only by a Catholic writer, then was not English literature at one time Catholic, when Chaucer, Langland, and the mystic Richard Rolle of Hampole were busy writing?

Newman further declares that "by 'Catholic literature' is not to be understood a literature which treats exclusively or primarily of Catholic matters, of Catholic doctrine, controversy, history, persons, or politics; but it includes all subjects of literature whatever, treated as a Catholic would treat them, and as he only can treat them."<sup>33</sup> This is an all-embracing definition. It assumes that there is one standard way of seeing things peculiar to all Catholic authors.



This is obviously so, since Greene, Waugh, Mauriac, and O'Connor are all Roman Catholics, and although each has an individual way of writing, their views about life and about man reflect the teachings of their Church.

Is "Catholic literature," literature written by Catholics? Or is it literature addressed to Catholics? Or is it literature about Catholics? Does what happens in the novel have to depend on a Catholic framework of theology before it can be called Catholic? If there is a "Catholic novel," can one have a Protestant novel, with all the sub-species this would entail -- Methodist novel? Baptist novel? Mormon novel? Braybrooke cautions that "a man is first and foremost a novelist by talent and either an Anglican, Nonconformist or Catholic by belief."<sup>34</sup> He adds:

However, should he be blessed with the ability to write fiction, other talents being equal, such a novelist who also happens to be a Catholic has certain advantages over his fellow writers in that his work has a defined religious framework into which it can be fitted; in that it has roots which are spiritual and therefore eternal; in that it makes his work an acknowledged quest because what matters in the end is that he should achieve his salvation through it. For a man to shirk his responsibilities as an artist is to renounce a God-given trust.<sup>35</sup>

This is not really a definition of "Catholic novel," for if one substituted the word "Christian" for "Catholic" in the above quotation, the quotation would apply equally well to Anglican or Methodist or Mormon or Presbyterian writers. Josephine Jacobsen, while acknowledging that the term is "nebulous," yet postulates what seems to be an adequate and workable definition. She points out that a "Catholic novel" does not become one by the mere fact that its author



is a Catholic; neither must the term "Catholic novelist" be used to describe a writer who uses his pen for the purpose of propagandizing for his church. Instead, a "Catholic novelist" is one whose writing is overtly concerned with the religious, and, specifically, the Catholic vision, a writer who introduces into his work not merely viewpoints which are the outgrowth of his faith, but the specific mark of its presence; the writer whose work, whether or not concerned with religious subject matter, springs from and returns to its identity in the church and which sees all things within the focus of its belief.<sup>36</sup>

The significant phrase is "the Catholic vision." And of what does this vision consist? "The universe of the Catholic fiction writer is one that is founded on the theological truths of the faith, but particularly on three of them which are basic -- the Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment."<sup>37</sup> These are basically the same subjects any Christian novelist would use, but obviously the Roman Catholic writer's vision will be different from that of his Protestant counterpart, since Roman Catholic theology, while sharing certain essentials with Protestant theology, differs in other aspects. Since it is theology which shapes the vision, the definitions given earlier (Newman's excepted) are incomplete because they took no notice of this fact.

O'Connor further points out, in what could well serve as an apt commentary on Greene's fiction:

The Catholic novel can't be categorized by subject matter, but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality. It cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace. And it will see this grace as working through nature, but as entirely transcending it, so that a door is always open to possibility and the unexpected in



the human soul. Its center of meaning will be Christ; its center of destruction will be the devil. No matter how this view of life may be fleshed out, these assumptions form its skeleton.<sup>38</sup>

The "Catholic novel" may seem needlessly partisan to the non-Catholic reader. Evelyn Waugh noted this danger. "It is a common complaint against Catholics," he notes, "that they intrude their religion into every discussion. . . . This is, in a way, true; the Catholic's life is bounded and directed by his creed at every turn and reminders of this fact may well prove tedious to his Protestant or agnostic neighbours."<sup>39</sup> Catholics, both Greene and Waugh stress, are aware in a way that non-Catholics aren't. Scobie knows he is doing wrong in having an affair with Helen Rolt; Pinkie knows that Hell is a reality; Julia Flyte knows that she cannot marry Captain Ryder, even though she has obtained a divorce from her husband, Rex Mottram -- the church does not admit divorce, and so she is still tied to Rex. The Catholic novelist shows his characters as having free will, and the moral choices they make depend upon this freedom. The non-religious writer limits himself to depicting this world, and is not concerned with the irruption of the divine into it. The religious writer acknowledges the spiritual; the non-religious writer denies it -- or simply ignores it.

The Catholic novelist's art, therefore, is concerned with charting the relationship between God and man. He will be concerned with good and evil, and with sin's various and varying manifestations in the world. Since sin is more attractive than goodness, and is also easier to represent, it may seem that his vision is shocking, grotesque,



or pessimistic. Yet he provides a link with the Middle Ages, since he writes from a point of view which St Thomas Aquinas would have understood; for, like the Angelic Doctor of the thirteenth century, the "Catholic novelist" of the twentieth century presents "the story of man and the world according to the divine plan of salvation."<sup>40</sup>



## CHAPTER II

### JOURNEY WITH MAPS:

#### A TOUR OF GREENELAND

Graham Greene, commenting on what he sees to be the novelist's task, declares that it is the writer's duty "to tell the truth as he sees it."<sup>1</sup> In novels, plays, literary criticism and two travel books, Greene presents his version of the truth, displaying in the process a pessimistic vision of a seedy world populated by equally shabby inhabitants who, enmeshed in the coils of mortality, struggle ignobly through the dreary settings in which they are placed. As Raven, the hunted hare-lipped murderer in A Gun For Sale drearily comments, "This isn't a world I'd bring children into."<sup>2</sup> And in one of his essays, Greene quotes Gauguin as saying, "Life being what is, one dreams of revenge"<sup>3</sup> -- a statement which Pinkie Brown (Brighton Rock) or D. (The Confidential Agent) or Arthur Rowe (The Ministry of Fear) would enthusiastically approve.

In writing as he does, Greene is but giving literary expression to a private vision of the world, which he gained in childhood, and which is given at length in his collection of essays, The Lost Childhood; and in the two travel books, The Lawless Roads and Journey Without Maps. Greene observes that "every creative writer worth our



consideration, every writer who can be called in the wide eighteenth-century sense of the term a poet, is a victim: a man given to an obsession."<sup>4</sup> Greene's obsession is with the grim, the dour and the seedy, and when he attempts humour or lightheartedness (as in Loser Takes All, or Our Man in Havana), the attempt does not quite come off -- the exception to this remark being, however, the recent and delightful Travels With My Aunt. Allott and Farris, in their sensible study of Greene, point out that this "seediness stands for a permanent truth about the human condition."<sup>5</sup>

Greene's vision, as stated above, was gained in childhood, and was obtained from the books he read. He admits: "Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives. In later life we admire, we are entertained, we may modify some views we already hold, but we are more likely to find in books merely a confirmation of what is in our minds already: as in a love affair it is our own features that we see reflected flatteringly back."<sup>6</sup>

He records "the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee"<sup>7</sup> he felt on finding a new story by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, or Stanley Weyman -- all of them writers of adventure-romances. He discovered, however, that Haggard's heroes, English gentlemen all, were too good to be true -- "they were not life as one had already begun to know it."<sup>8</sup> At fourteen, he read Marjorie Bowen's lurid Viper of Milan, and found that it was more to his taste; it was then that the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write. All the other possible futures slid away: the potential civil servant, the don, the clerk had to look for other



incarnations. Imitation after imitation of Miss Bowen's magnificent novel went into exercise books -- stories of sixteenth-century Italy or twelfth-century England marked with enormous brutality and a despairing romanticism.<sup>9</sup> It was as if I had been supplied once and for all with a subject.

He found in Miss Bowen's novel "the sense of doom that lies over success -- the feeling that the pendulum is about to swing."<sup>10</sup>

Adolescent memories also provided him with a vision of life; school, for example, was a place where

one met for the first time characters, adult and adolescent, who bore about them the genuine quality of evil. There was Collifax, who practised torments with dividers; Mr Cranden with three grim chins, a dusty gown, a kind of demoniac sensuality; from these heights evil declined towards Parlow, whose desk was filled with minute photographs -- advertisements of art photos. Hell lay about them in their infancy.<sup>11</sup>

The two highlights (if highlights they can be called) in Greene's youth were his sense of boredom and his attempts at suicide. Between eleven and twelve, he successively drank developing fluid ("under the impression that it was poisonous"), and hay fever lotion containing cocaine; ate deadly nightshade; and experimented with Russian roulette with his brother's revolver -- "the chance, of course, was six to one in favour of life." The sense of boredom also impelled him to run away from school, and this led to professional treatment at the hands of a psychoanalyst. His experiment with the gun grew boring in its turn, and he gave it up -- "one campaign was over, but the war against boredom had got to go on."<sup>12</sup>

A selection of highly significant personal memories are also given in The Lawless Roads. Greene remembers vividly the attempted suicide of a man about to cut his throat; the actual suicide of a



pregnant girl of fifteen on the railway line; a woman confessing to a murder; the "dim drab high street" with its fake Tudor café; shabby second-hand book shops; and "Irish servant girls making their assignations for a ditch" with "youths with smarmed and scented hair and bitten cigarettes" who would greet them "with careless roughness."<sup>13</sup> In this world of violence and depravity, Greene at fourteen

like a revelation . . . realised the pleasure of cruelty; I wasn't interested any longer in walks on commons, in playing cricket on the beach. There was a girl lodging close by I wanted to do things to; I loitered outside the door hoping to see her. I didn't do anything about it, I wasn't old enough, but I was happy; I could think about pain as something desirable and not as something dreaded. It was as if I had discovered that the way to enjoy life was to appreciate pain.<sup>14</sup>

And in Brighton Rock he draws a picture of a teenaged gang leader as anti-social as his creator had been in adolescence.

Personal experience and juvenile reading provided Greene with a view of the world as "the ravaged and disputed territory between the two eternities."<sup>15</sup> He "had lived for fourteen years in a wild jungle country without a map, but now the paths had been traced and naturally one had to follow them."<sup>16</sup> It remains now to chart Greene's obsessions as they are embodied in his fictional world; to find out, as Greene puts it, that "moment of crystallization when the dominant theme is plainly expressed, when the private universe becomes visible even to the least sensitive reader."<sup>17</sup> Greene sees in Henry James an obsession with treachery; in Walter de la Mare an obsession with death; and in Hardy, an obsession with pity. "The



obsession is perhaps most easily detected in the symbols an author uses,"<sup>18</sup> Greene asseverates, and to find out the Greene obsessions this method can equally be applied to his own fiction.

R.W.B. Lewis declares of Greene's world that it is "a baffling landscape, at once harrowing and seedy . . . the landscape of Greene's writings is never simply a background; indeed it is never a background at all -- it is a setting, a situation. It is the human situation made scenic."<sup>19</sup> Greene's world is extensive, but never varied: Mexico, the Congo, West Africa, Indo-China all share a marked similarity with Brighton, Hyde Park, Paddington or the Tottenham Court Road; they all share the common denominator of seediness -- and by seediness, Greene achieves a metaphor for the modern world. In his travel book on Mexico, Greene notices the decaying chapels and stinking garbage heaps, the beggars, the filth and the squalor -- and this is all reflected back faithfully in The Power and The Glory. In Brighton Rock one is shown the slums of Nelson Place, the Satanic boy-gangster Pinkie, the shyster lawyer Prewitt; and Brighton, stripped of its spurious gaiety, is disclosed as a world of murderous activity and race-track gangs. In The Heart of The Matter, the dead pye-dogs are there as a matter of course; and two seedy public school men, Wilson and Harris, evolve a nightly ritual of cockroach-hunting to while away the tedious hours, while in the daytime the vultures alight unconcernedly on the corrugated iron roofs. In The Ministry of Fear a men's lavatory is described -- "the smell of disinfectant, the greyish basins, and the little notices about



venereal disease."<sup>20</sup>

The heat beats down in Mexico, and Indian children with worms eat earth in The Power and The Glory; beetles, cockroaches and vultures are omnipresent in West Africa. England fares no better. As the agent D. walks through Hyde Park, "down the road . . . cars waited for the right easy girls . . . cheap prostitutes sat hopelessly in the shadows . . . blackmailers kept an eye open on the grass, where the deeds of darkness were quietly and unsatisfactorily accomplished."<sup>21</sup> Even in his non-fiction, Greene's descriptions verge on the morose. There are allusions to "the long waste of the Clapham Road . . . Victorian houses falling into decay in their little burial grounds of stone and weed";<sup>22</sup> "Great Portland Street [with its] secondhand cars and the faded genial men with old school ties, Paddington [with its] vicious hotels . . . Bloomsbury Square with its inexpensive vice";<sup>23</sup> "the grim wastes of Queen Victoria Street and Tottenham Court Road";<sup>24</sup> "couples sprawling in ugly passion on the Hyde Park grass or on chairs performing uglier acts under the shelter of overcoats";<sup>25</sup> the London beggars are "poor bitter men playing gramophones in . . . gutters."<sup>26</sup>

There are two compelling symbols in Greene's work, the battlefield and the border. Greene sees the world in terms of a battlefield: The world is all of a piece of course; it is engaged everywhere in the same subterranean struggle, lying like a tiny neutral state, with whom no one ever observes his treaties, between the two eternities of pain and -- God knows the opposite of pain, not we. It is a Belgium fought over by friend and enemy alike. There is no peace anywhere where there is human life, but there are, I told myself, quiet and active sectors of the line. Russia, Spain, Mexico -- there's no fraternisation on



Christmas morning in those parts. The horror may be the same, it is an intrinsic part of human life in every place: it attacks you in the Strand or the tropics; but where the eagles are gathered together, it is not unnatural to expect to find the Son of Man as well.<sup>27</sup>

His novel, It's A Battlefield, has an epigraph from Kinglake, about "English soldiery . . . fighting its own little battle in happy and advantageous ignorance of the action." The struggle in the novel concerns itself over the fate of Jim Drover, a London bus-conductor who had killed a police officer while defending his wife. Conrad Drover, his brother, and Milly, Jim's wife, fight on his behalf to obtain a reprieve; on the other side are arranged the forces of law and order, as exemplified in the Assistant Commissioner, whose sole concern is with his duty. One can also see in the novel, overtones of the class struggle. In The Man Within, The Heart of the Matter, or The End of the Affair, the struggle is individualized and internalized. In The Quiet American, there are two struggles going on: the war between the French and the Vietnamese, and the private war between Thomas Fowler and Alden Pyle over Phuong; and at the same time, Fowler is struggling with his conscience.

The symbol of the border Greene borrows from his own experience. His father was headmaster of the school he attended, Berkhamsted. The family living quarters were separated from the rest of the school by a green baize door:

If you pushed open a green baize door in a passage by my father's study, you entered another passage deceptively similar, but none the less you were on alien ground. There would be a slight smell of iodine from the matron's room, of damp towels from the changing rooms, of ink everywhere. Shut the door behind you again, and the world smelt differently: books and fruit and eau-de-Cologne.



One was an inhabitant of both countries: on Saturday and Sunday afternoons of one side of the baize door, the rest of the week of the other. How can life on a border be other than restless?<sup>28</sup>

In The Power and The Glory, escape over the border means safety for the whiskey priest. Other borders, metaphorically, demarcate the countries of good and evil; Rose, in Brighton Rock, is pictured in contrast to Pinkie, as "a stranger in the country of mortal sin."<sup>29</sup> Some borders remain stubbornly closed to other characters: Ida Arnold, the blowsy, port-loving tart, who has no knowledge of the deep mystery of sin, is portrayed "as if she were in a strange country: the typical Englishwoman abroad."<sup>30</sup>

Greene's view of life, as embodied in his fiction and non-fiction, is seen as pessimistic by some, and as realistic by others. W. Gore Allen accuses Greene of partiality, and of falsification of the facts: "Never was an author so enamoured of the sterile, the aseptic, the unripe."<sup>31</sup> Another critic mildly and jocularly remarks that "like Lear, Greene needs an ounce of civet to sweeten his imagination."<sup>32</sup> And it must be admitted that Greene's habitual selection of the most squalid of life-experiences, does in the long run distort reality.

In The Brothers Karamazov, the dying brother of Father Zossima enthusiastically declares: "Life is paradise, and we are all in paradise, but we refuse to see it."<sup>33</sup> But for Pinkie Brown, the realities of existence consist of worms, cataracts, cancer and a depressing existence eked out with the ill-nourished and ill-favoured Rose in the squalid grime of Nelson Place's derelict houses. In



The Quiet American, Fowler shares Pinkie's view. He comments, after viewing a typical Hollywood film about romance and adventure, that it was inadequate for the realities of today; instead, "the sight of Oedipus emerging with his bleeding eyeballs from the palace at Thebes would surely give a better training for life today."<sup>34</sup> Both Pinkie, Raven, and Fowler would agree with Anthony Farrant's assessment -- "It's a dreary world."<sup>35</sup>

The "deep appeal of the seedy" also operates in Greene's portrayal of his characters, who are mostly misfits or outsiders. These have Greene's sympathy: the ones who adapt, like Ida Arnold with her constant reiteration of the offensive phrase, "It's a good life," are given Greene's contempt. The misfits are the unsuccessful, the ones who have never recovered from the blows life inflicted on them. But Greene deals with them tenderly because they are at least aware in a sense that the successful are not. As Greene writes, "Perhaps in many so conditioned it is the love of God that mainly survives, because in his eyes they can imagine themselves remaining always drab, seedy, unsuccessful, and therefore worthy of notice."<sup>36</sup>

These misfits are usually set apart by some defect or inadequacy, whether interior or exterior. In the latter case, a physical defect usually symbolizes some inner deficiency. Maurice Bendrix (The End of the Affair) has a limp; Anthony Farrant, the untrustworthy brother of Kate (England Made Me) has a scar and a smile which serves the same function as a leper's bell -- it warns people to keep out of his way; the rationalist Smythe (The End of the



Affair) has a strawberry birth-mark which disfigures his otherwise handsome features; and Raven (A Gun For Sale) has a hare-lip.

Where the outward defect is not present, inner or psychological defects are presented. Mr Tench (The Power and The Glory) is helpless and futile; Captain Fellows in the same novel is bluff but unsubstantial. Mrs Scobie (The Heart of the Matter) is a pathetic snob, while Helen Rolt is a pathetic girl-woman; Major Scobie himself is undone by his feelings of pity. Rycker and Father Thomas (A Burnt-Out Case) are both hypocrites. The typical misfit-as-outsider is Raven, who "had been made by hatred; it had constructed him into this thin smoky murderous figure in the rain, hunted and ugly. . . . He had never felt the least tenderness for anyone; he was made in this image and he had his own odd pride in the result; he didn't want to be unmade."<sup>37</sup> He has committed many murders, he is on the run from the police; yet the reader has more sympathy for him than for those pillars of respectability, Sir Marcus and Mr Cholmondeley, who had paid him to murder, paid him off in stolen banknotes, thereby doublecrossing their victim -- and all this in order to start a European war so that Sir Marcus' munitions factory might benefit.

Just as Raven is hunted down by the police, other Greene protagonists are also hunted. Andrews, betrayer of his gang of smugglers, is hunted down by Carlyon (The Man Within). Arthur Rowe is hunted by spies, who want the microfilm hidden in the cake he had won at the fete (The Ministry of Fear). Major Scobie is hunted by Wilson, who suspects that he has a hand in the diamond smuggling in



the West African colony (The Heart of the Matter). Pinkie is hunted by Ida, Greene's debased symbol for retribution (Brighton Rock). Sarah Miles is hunted by Parkis, the detective Maurice Bendrix has put on her trail (The End of the Affair). The whiskey priest is hunted by the lieutenant across a Mexican province (The Power and The Glory). Rollo Martins hunts Harry Lime in the sewers of Vienna (The Third Man). The journalist Parkinson hunts after Querry and has him at bay in the steamy African jungle (A Burnt-Out Case).

The hunted hero usually yearns for peace. Scobie locks himself in his office to escape people; Andrews wants an end to running; Fowler longs nostalgically for a "Someone to whom I could say I was sorry";<sup>38</sup> and Pinkie yearns for an end to killing, and prays to be at peace.

Greene's characters are usually a disappointing group, consisting of neurotics, villains, grotesques, failures, nonentities, and sinners. The saints and martyrs are in the minority.

Put in theological terms, Greene's obsession with what Allott and Farris call "the fallen world" is an attempt to give literary expression to the doctrine of original sin, which Eliot calls "a very real and tremendous thing."<sup>39</sup> Put very simply, the doctrine means that man, affected by Adam's sin, has a tendency to choose evil over good. This does not mean, however, that man is so corrupted as to be without the capacity for choosing good.<sup>40</sup> Greene appends a quotation from Cardinal Newman to serve as an epigraph to The Lawless Roads, and that statement could serve also as an introduction to Greene's



own work:

To consider the world in its length and breadth . . . the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope, and without God in the world" -- all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution.

What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer, that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence . . . if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity.

Greene has been aptly described as an Augustinian novelist. Augustinianism entails "a particular view of the condition of human nature and of the causes of that condition."<sup>41</sup> Three propositions of Augustinianism can be seen reflected in the work of Greene. Augustine places emphasis on the role of love, of which there are two kinds, secular and divine, or profane and sacred. The divine is to be preferred over the secular, since human love, although good in itself, is inferior to the sacred. This attitude finds expression in The End of The Affair, where Sarah Miles gives up an adulterous affair with the novelist Maurice Bendrix, to find a deeper and more fulfilling relationship with God. The Augustinian gloom over sex and marriage is also reflected faithfully in Greene -- Major Scobie's marriage with Louise is not a happy one, nor is Scobie's relationship with Helen Rolt satisfactory. In The Man Within, Andrews goes to bed with the tart Lucy, "wallows" as he puts it, but is tormented by his conscience afterwards.<sup>42</sup> Phil Corkery, after a bout with the amorous Ida Arnold in Brighton Rock, is depicted with his eyes "yellow with



the sexual effort";<sup>43</sup> and Pinkie in the same novel has a Puritanical revulsion for the things of the flesh. In Stamboul Train, the vacuous Janet Pardoe has an unhealthy Lesbian affair with the dominating newspaperwoman, Mabel Warren. The relationship between Sarah Miles and Maurice Bendrix is soured because of Bendrix's fits of jealousy. The affair between Michael Dennis and Rose Pemberton in The Living Room ends with Rose's suicide.

Augustine sees sin as pervasive, and as a factor which, inhibiting spiritual growth, gets in the way of the individual's relationship with God. There are two kinds of evil, natural evil and moral evil. Greene, writing of Ford Madox Ford, comments: "Human nature in his books was usually phosphorescent . . . The little virtue that existed only attracted evil. -- But to Mr Ford, a Catholic in theory though not for long in practice, this was neither surprising nor depressing."<sup>44</sup> Greene also sees human nature as corrupt, though not hopelessly so. Greene's concern is with moral evil, or sin. Man is a fallen creature, and latent in him is the capacity for evil.

Greene follows Henry James in depicting moral evil. Evil in James usually occurs as a betrayal of trust, as in The Wings of the Dove, or in The Golden Bowl, where the bowl's flaw reflects the crack in the marriage of Maggie Verver and Prince Amerigo. The betrayal motif appears in Greene's The Power and The Glory, and the betrayer is the Judas-like mestizo. In James's Turn of the Screw, evil is also discovered behind the mask of innocence, as the two children, Miles and Flora, are found to be in league with the evil Quint and Miss



Jessel. Greene, too, finds that hell lies around children, and that the innocence of childhood is a myth. Indeed, when Greene uses the word innocence, he does not signify by it a virtue, but a defect. Innocence is equated with ignorance. Alden Pyle is the American innocent abroad, cheerfully killing civilians with his plastic bombs, unaware of the true political realities. Innocence means ignorance, and paradoxically, corruption may lead to holiness, as the whiskey priest discovers on reflection -- "What an unbearable creature he must have been in those days . . . Then, in his innocence, he had felt no love for anyone: now in his corruption he had learnt."<sup>45</sup>

Prince Amerigo tells Maggie Verver, "Everything's terrible, cara -- in the heart of man,"<sup>46</sup> and Greene, also, finds this to be true. Brigitta, the illegitimate offspring of the whiskey priest and Maria, is only a child, but already she has the infection of sin in her heart. One can detect, perhaps, a note of disappointment in Greene when he fails to find instances of sin. He writes, for example, apropos of San Antonio, in Mexico: "Original sin under the spell of elegance has lost its meaning. Where, I thought, loitering on a bridge above the little tamed river, was there any sign of that 'terrible aboriginal calamity' which Newman perceived everywhere?"<sup>47</sup>

The third Augustinian element in Greene's fiction is the failure of his characters to achieve salvation by their own efforts. Augustine held that man is helped on the road to salvation by God's grace. Grace is defined as "the sum total of God's free gifts, the purpose of which is to make man's salvation possible in the state of



fallen nature."<sup>48</sup> Grace is supernatural, irresistible, and gratuitous.<sup>49</sup> Grace means a progression in holiness, but Greene usually speeds the process up, especially, for example, in the case of Sarah Miles.

Greene is contemptuous of modern "civilization," because he feels it lacks the sense of the numinous. In Mexico, reading in American magazine, he dismisses it and the culture which produced it, because "it wasn't evil, it wasn't anything at all, it was just the drugstore and the Coca-Cola, the hamburger, the sinless empty graceless chromium world."<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, he sees in Africa a society which has not yet lost touch with the mysterious, a society where the supernatural has not yet been replaced by the quotidian. He made a trek through Liberia in 1935 because he wanted to find "one's place in time, based on a knowledge not only of one's present but of the past from which one has emerged."<sup>51</sup> The fixation with Africa had been present in his youth, from the time when he had read King Solomon's Mines, and he had been fascinated by the witch, Gagool:

Gagool I could recognize -- didn't she wait for me in dreams every night in the passage by the linen cupboard, near the nursery door? And she continues to wait, when the mind is sick or tired, though now she is dressed in the theological garments of Despair and speaks in Spenser's accents:

The longer life, I wote the greater sin,  
The greater sin, the greater punishment.

Yes, Gagool has remained a permanent part of the imagination.<sup>52</sup>

In Africa, Greene received "the sense that one was nearer than one had ever been to the racial source";<sup>53</sup> witnessing the devil dance at Mosambolahun, he comments: "One had the sensation of having



come home, for here one was finding associations with a personal and racial childhood."<sup>54</sup> Africa represented the childhood of the race, and that being so, Greene's purpose in visiting that continent was to compare it with the "civilization" later created by man -- "when one sees to what unhappiness, to what perils of extinction centuries of cerebration have brought us, one sometimes has a curiosity to discover if one can from what we have come, to recall at which point we went astray."<sup>55</sup>

He found in Liberia "a seediness . . . you couldn't get to the same extent elsewhere, and seediness has a very deep appeal: even the seediness of civilization . . . It seems to satisfy, temporarily, the sense of nostalgia for something lost; it seems to represent a stage further back."<sup>56</sup> Again, Greene points out that the seedy "is nearer the beginning; like Monrovia its building has begun wrong, but at least it has only begun; it hasn't reached so far away as the smart, the chic, the cerebral"; and "it is only . . . when one has appreciated such a beginning, its terrors as well as its placidity, the power as well as the gentleness, the pity for what we have done with ourselves is driven more forcibly home."<sup>57</sup>

Somewhere, laments Greene, the human race took the wrong turning and ended up with a graceless, chromium civilization. In Africa what he "found was not a prelapsarian Eden, but Eden at the moment the apple is to be plucked: neither guilty nor innocent of the forces of evil."<sup>58</sup> Africa might be seedy, but the seedy has a deep appeal, since it is closer to the supernatural than the chromium;



hence Greene's desire to "get back to this bareness, simplicity, instinctive friendliness, feeling rather than thought, and start again";<sup>59</sup> for Africa represents "the finer taste, the finer pleasure, the finer terror on which we might have built."<sup>60</sup>

In the seedy -- the slums of Nelson Place, or West Africa, or Mexico -- can be found good and evil. In the chromium civilization one runs up against a monumental Nothing; there is no place for the supernatural. Thus, Greene concludes:

This journey, if it had done nothing else, had reinforced a sense of disappointment with what man had made out of the primitive, what he had made out of childhood. Oh, one wanted to protest, one doesn't believe, of course, in "the visionary gleam," in the trailing glory, but there was something in that early terror and bareness of one's needs, a harp strumming behind a hut, a witch on the nursery landing, a handful of kola nuts, a masked dancer, the poisoned flowers. The sense of taste was finer, the sense of pleasure keener, the sense of terror deeper and purer.<sup>61</sup>



## CHAPTER III

### GRAHAM GREENE: THE RELIGIOUS AFFAIR

Greene is a convert to Catholicism, with the sensibility of the convert, which manifests itself in a quality which may be termed "enthusiasm." He considers himself "a Catholic with an intellectual if not an emotional belief in Catholic dogma,"<sup>1</sup> and asserts that he "had not been converted to a religious faith. I had been convinced by specific arguments in the probability of its creed."<sup>2</sup> (Evelyn Waugh, also, claims to have entered the Roman Church "on firm intellectual conviction";<sup>3</sup> Mauriac, on the contrary, bewails the fact that he had no say in the matter of his religion: "I was born into it; I did not choose it; this religion has been imposed on me from the day of my birth.")<sup>4</sup>

The "convert sensibility" manifests itself in Greene in his fondness for the mysterious and miraculous elements in Catholicism. He asserts that "we are too apt to minimize the magic elements in Christianity -- the man raised from the dead, the devils cast out."<sup>5</sup> He treads with daring the tightrope of sin mysticism. Mauriac, while praising Greene -- "We feel it is that hidden presence of God in an atheistic world, that subterranean flowing of Grace which dazzles Graham Greene much more than the majestic facade which the temporal



Church still erects above the peoples"<sup>6</sup> -- confesses to being bewildered by his work, since it "always gives me the sensation of being in a foreign land . . . everything takes place as though I were penetrating into an old estate through a concealed door unknown to me . . ."<sup>7</sup>

Greene's interest in paradoxes -- the greatest sinner may become the greatest saint; the bargainings so many of his characters make with God; the theological posturing in The Potting Shed; the factitiousness, the contrivances, and the authorial engineering that goes on in The Heart of The Matter -- makes one inclined to accept Turnell's sour evaluation of him: "There is a certain lack of spontaneity. We feel [he has] been browsing too much over theological treatises without always understanding them."<sup>8</sup>

Greene's conversion took place in 1926. He explains the circumstances of his baptism:

In Nottingham I was instructed in Catholicism, travelling here and there by tram into new country with the fat priest who had once been an actor . . . The cathedral was a dark place full of inferior statues. I was baptised one foggy afternoon about four o'clock. I couldn't think of any names I particularly wanted, so I kept my old name. I was alone with the fat priest; it was all very quickly and formally done, while someone at a children's service muttered in another chapel.<sup>9</sup>

He converted to Roman Catholicism because of his dissatisfaction with the Anglicanism to which he had been subjected at school: "The Anglican Church could not supply the same intimate symbols for heaven; only a big brass eagle, an organ voluntary, 'Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing.'" Later, he goes on, "one began slowly,



painfully, reluctantly, to populate heaven. The Mother of God took the place of the brass eagle: one began to have a dim conception of the appalling mysteries of love moving through a ravaged world -- the Curé d'Ars admitting to his mind all the impurity of a province, Péguy challenging God in the cause of the damned.<sup>10</sup>

Greene confesses that after his reception into the Roman Church, "in my spare time I read a good deal of theology -- sometimes with fascination, sometimes with repulsion, nearly always with interest."<sup>11</sup>

Greene's trip to Mexico in 1938 to report on religious persecution there undoubtedly influenced his novel, The Power and The Glory, and perhaps also it had the effect of giving to Brighton Rock the religious orientation it has. He remarks:

My professional life and my religion were contained in quite separate compartments, and I had no ambition to bring them together. It was "clumsy life again at her stupid work" which did that; on one side, the socialist persecution of religion in Mexico and on the other General Franco's attack on Republican Spain inextricably involved religion in contemporary life.

I think it was under those two influences . . . that I began to examine more closely the effect of faith on action. Catholicism was no longer primarily symbolic, a ceremony at an altar with the correct canonical number of candles, with the women in my Chelsea congregation wearing their best hats, nor was it a philosophical page in Father D'Arcy's Nature of Belief. It was closer now to death in the afternoon.<sup>12</sup>

Even before he was converted, however, he had a philosophy of life which, extracted from Marjorie Bowen's Viper of Milan, was later reinforced by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Miss Bowen, Greene writes, "had given me my pattern -- religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there -- perfect



evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done."<sup>13</sup> Between 1938 and 1951, Greene published the four novels which are explicitly Catholic, but the early novels also display an implicit religious view. Allott and Farris define the theme of these early novels as that of "the divided mind,"<sup>14</sup> but as Stratford points out this is "simply a literary term which embraces the psychology of the sinner."<sup>15</sup>

The Man Within deals with the "divided mind" of its protagonist, Andrews; the division occurs between Andrews' two selves, between the pull of the body and that of the spirit. The epigraph to the novel, deriving from Romans 7, 22-24, is objectified in Andrews' "terror of life, of going on soiling himself and repenting and soiling himself again."<sup>16</sup> Andrews' memories take the form of longing for "the enjoyment of quiet . . . music and the singing in Exeter Cathedral" (25). Andrews has a need to confess, and prays to God, although like the sceptical Maurice Bendrix or Thomas Fowler, he doesn't think a God exists. Elisabeth, the saintly heroine, believes in the resurrection (63-64), the biblical truths (64), and in heaven (65). Religious themes, especially those of sin and guilt, are present in this early novel. Greene notes elsewhere that the hallmark of a Christian civilization is "la conscience inquiète, le sentiment de l'échec personnel,"<sup>17</sup> and no doubt was trying to objectify this in Andrews.

The Name of Action deals with an idealistic young hero, Oliver Chant, as he tries to aid financially a group of revolutionaries who hope to overthrow Demassener, the local dictator of Trier. There are



some Catholic characters in this novel: Frau Gruner, who wants her executed son to have a Christian burial, and who will have a mass said for his soul;<sup>18</sup> Frau Weber, described as a "good Catholic" (282), who has the following dialogue with Chant:

"Have you done nothing wrong, Frau Weber?" She showed not the least surprise at his words. Why should she? She asked herself the same question every night before lapsing into unexcited sleep. "Of course. But I have been forgiven."

"You are certain even of that?"

She smiled at him. "You are not a Catholic, Herr Chant. I can see that." (284-85)

Here Frau Weber, with the certainty which Catholicism gives, knows that after confession and absolution, sins are forgiven. Frau Weber's certitude is also shown in the following exchange that she has with Chant:

"You ought not to worry so much," she said. "If we are doing what God means us to do, everything will be all right."

"But if He doesn't?"

She laughed at him. "Then it will be just as well if we fail." (286-87)

There is a description of the church in which Chant has an assignation with Anne-Marie Demassener, wife of the dictator of Trier:

The lights were very dim in the church of Our Lady. Slender pillars disappeared in the shadows below the roof to reappear again as they drooped to meet a new pillar across the aisle with the grace of a stem bent by the weight of a flower. The white feet and face of a gigantic hanging Christ glimmered through the dark from an invisible cross. It had none of the effect of a pitying God. . . . Two old women followed the Stations of the Cross, pushing their way slowly from pillar to pillar, against a night which, like a dark spirit, strove to delay their attempts at holiness. (289)

Rumour at Nightfall, set in Catholic Spain, allows more scope for the use of Catholic atmosphere and Catholic characters. Chase, the English journalist, cannot understand the Spanish attitudes



to death, nor the pervasive influence of their religion on the Spaniards: "Round corners, in the shadows cast by anonymous peaks, stood wooden crosses bearing bloodstained and contorted Christs, the superstitious emblems of a race untouched by scientific knowledge. Their religion seemed to him not a consolation but a horror, the product of a deadly cold and an intolerable heat."<sup>19</sup> When the dying Roca calls for a priest to confess him, Chase the Protestant does not understand; "he was shocked by the long effort required of the dying man. Why can't they leave him in peace, he thought, instead of harrying him to death with uncomfortable questions?" (8). Prayers for the dead fill Chase with embarrassment and uneasiness, and he contrasts Catholic Spain with Protestant London -- "There one could laugh with confidence at the notion of hell" (10).

Colonel Riego both prays before a statue of the Virgin, and says the rosary; a procedure confirming Chase in his belief that the Spanish are "barbarians" and "behind the times." Chase, with his "distrust of religion" (33), compares England with Spain:

The bells were ringing here and there for Benediction. The sounds came from every quarter of the town, borne on the cold evening wind, tossed in the gusts, wildly melancholy. They reminded him, by their very difference, of evening at home, a gentle, sentimentally sad ringing across fields, the respectable slow footsteps in the porch, the gossip across the tombstones, and inside the drone of undisturbing prayer. Here men and women would be kneeling on the flags, their faces lifted in adoration of the raised Host, containing what they believed to be the living flesh and blood of God. (236)

Spain, to Chase, is summed up by "the strange standards" of its people, "the importance they put on death, the superstition . . . Smoke and flames, the fear of hell, no gaiety . . . and all day long,



as they believe, God being swallowed alive in their dismal churches" (179). Michael Crane in the same novel prefigures a sentiment Major Scobie is later to have. Reflecting, in a church, on the Real Presence, he comes to the conclusion: "If there is a God, he thought, if that wafer is flesh and blood, enduring at every Communion the actual pain of Calvary, the torture of the nails and the torment of the thief's mockery, a thousand years foreshortened into this moment, may one be allowed to pity God?" (213). Crane, uninstructed in Catholicism, does not realize that Christ, in the Eucharistic sacrifice, does not suffer a new Calvary at every communion.

Crane envies the Catholic Eulelia Monti her faith -- "he had seen the effect of belief on many people. He knew it was regarded as a recipe for peace, an ingredient of courage" (129).

Dr Czinner in Stamboul Train, first published in 1932, is a portrait of a lapsed Catholic and failed revolutionary. Dr Czinner tells himself "that God was a fiction invented by the rich to keep the poor content"<sup>20</sup> and therefore rejects that "two-faced God, a deity who comforted the poor in their distress . . . and . . . who had persuaded them, for the sake of a doubtful future, to endure their pain" (132). But Czinner still has a lingering faith in the religion of his youth, and longs for "the priest's face turned away, the raised fingers, the whisper of a dead tongue" because this "seemed to him suddenly as beautiful, as infinitely desirable and as hopelessly lost as youth and first love" (138). Czinner tries to make



his confession to Mr Opie, the Church of England clergyman on the train; but Mr Opie, whose main concern is with the formation of two cricket elevens at the British embassy in Buda, is unaware of Dr Czinner's spiritual needs, and fobs him off with a fruitless discussion about modern psychology and psychoanalysis.

In It's A Battlefield, first published in 1934, Jules Britton, a Roman Catholic, is seen praying in church for the condemned Jim Drover, and listening to the priest's sermon on sin -- "the fat priest rose above the pulpit, and the congregation withered into attitudes of meekness, piety and inattention."<sup>21</sup>

In England Made Me, first published in 1935, there is some satire on Minty, the "good Anglo-Catholic" journalist, who prays to St Louis and St Zephyrinus, and who is upset by the human body: "To think that God Himself had become man. Minty could not enter a church without the thought, which sickened him, which was more to him than the agony in the garden, the despair upon the cross."<sup>22</sup> He is pictured as diving into a church, because "the darkness, the glow of the sanctuary lamp drew him more than food. It was Lutheran, of course, but it had the genuine air of plaster images, of ever-burning light, of sins forgiven" (108-109).

In the entertainment, A Gun For Sale (first published in 1936), the killer Raven was brought up in an orphanage which practised a cold, cheerless Christianity, and this discoloured Raven's view of life. He sees Christ as a scapegoat and he equates the suffering Christ with the socially deprived of the world:



Love, Charity, Patience, Humility . . . he knew all about those virtues, he'd seen what they were worth. They twisted everything: even the story . . . was historical, it had happened, but they twisted it to their own purposes. They made him a god because they could feel fine about it all; they didn't have to consider themselves responsible for the raw deal they'd given him. He'd consented, hadn't he? That was the argument, because he could have called down "a legion of angels" if he'd wanted to escape hanging there. On your life he could, he thought with bitter lack of faith.<sup>23</sup>

In The Confidential Agent, the 1939 entertainment, D. is portrayed as having no belief in God. He thinks: "If you believed in God . . . you could leave punishment then to God . . . but he hadn't that particular faith. Unless people received their deserts, the world to him was chaos, he was faced with despair";<sup>24</sup> and he believes that if there was a God, that God "could only really be pictured as a joker" (237).

Wormold, the vacuum-cleaner salesman turned spy for the British Secret Service in Our Man in Havana, the entertainment of 1958, also believes in nothing, like D. His daughter Millie has been brought up a Catholic because of Wormold's promise to his wife on her death. Millie's mother had been "of no faith at all."<sup>25</sup> Millie, as a dutiful Catholic, "ate fish on Friday, fasted on Ember Days and attended Mass not only on Sundays and the special feasts of the church, but also on her saint's day" (10-11). Millie is convent-educated, meticulous in her religious observances, goes to confession, but uses her religion in a fraudulent manner. When she is guilty of any wrongdoing, she excuses herself on the ground that she has been tempted by the devil. There is a calculated ruthlessness in Millie, as she uses her religion to wheedle gifts out of her father; and she invokes the saints merely



to make sure that they work overtime to get her the presents she needs. Millie sees her father as "invincibly ignorant" theologically, but has hopes that he will "be saved like the good pagans. Socrates, you know, and Cetewayo" (32). Wormold is "unable to follow her into her strange world of candles and lace and holy water and genuflections" (14).

In The Comedians, there is little theology and little that is religious. It is true that Haiti of the novel is a symbol for hell on earth, over which the two dark angels, Dr Duvalier and Concasseur of the Tontons Macoute, preside. As in Stamboul Train, we are presented with a character who has lost his faith; Brown comments, "When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God. Life under his shadow was a very serious affair."<sup>26</sup> But the emphasis in this novel is on commitment. The Smiths, ludicrously, are committed to their vegetarianism; and Joseph the barman, calculatingly perhaps, is committed to Voodoo and to Catholicism. After Philipot's abortive rebellion against Duvalier, a priest says a mass for his dead companions, and stresses in his sermon the idea of commitment. Although violence as a solution to political problems may be wrong, the priest declares, "I would rather be wrong with St Thomas than right with the cold and the craven" (309). Dr Magiot also voices the same conclusion, in the letter, written before his death, to Brown:

Catholics and Communists have committed great crimes, but at least they have not stood aside, like an established society, and been indifferent. I would rather have blood on my hands than water like Pilate . . . if you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith. There is always an alternative to the faith we lose. Or is it the same faith under another mask? (311-12)



As can be seen from the discussion so far, Greene's use of the religious in his fiction amounts to little more than lending atmosphere to his settings, or giving memories to characters; and it also implies a Christian world-view. In the more explicitly Catholic novels, there is an emphasis on specifically Catholic things -- the sacramental system figures prominently in both The Heart of The Matter, and in The Power and The Glory. The emphasis on the importance of the sacrament of holy communion in the former novel contrasts with the debased "sacrament," the soma-drinking ritual in Huxley's Brave New World. Matrimony as an indissoluble union is stressed in The Heart of The Matter. In The End of The Affair, the sacrament of baptism is stressed; and in Brighton Rock Rose goes to confession.

Greene's characters can be divided into those who believe, and those who do not. Pinkie Brown believes, even though he does not practise what he believes. So does Major Scobie. Dr Czinner is a lapsed Catholic, with a desire to be drawn back into the fold. Querry searches for belief in a leproserie deep in the heart of Africa. Crane would like to share Eulelia Monti's faith. The unbelievers wish with melancholy that there might be a God for them to believe in -- this is the situation Thomas Fowler finds himself in. The Catholic characters' thoughts are coloured by their religion; Pinkie, hardened criminal though he is, habitually thinks in religious images. The dolls in a shooting gallery are like "Virgins in a church repository,"<sup>27</sup> and when he wins one for Rose he carries it as if he were "holding the Mother of God by the hair."<sup>28</sup> He has memories of "a



"whole lost world"<sup>29</sup> and sees Rose as "one of the small gaudy statues in an ugly church."<sup>30</sup>

The Catholic novels also show the presence of God's love in the world. The priest in The Power and The Glory comments on this to the disbelieving lieutenant: "God is love. I don't say the heart doesn't feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditch-water. We wouldn't recognize that love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us -- God's love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around."<sup>31</sup> Divine love is represented in The End of The Affair as far superior to human love; yet human love too has its place: if Pinkie Brown is damned, it is because he lacks love. Also, lack of love drives Rose Pemberton to despair and suicide in The Living Room.

Greene puts his Catholicism to use to provide him with similes and metaphors. In A Burnt-Out Case, "a soutane of heavy snow" covers a village church in a picture;<sup>32</sup> Father Thomas carries "his cardboard box elevated like a monstrance"<sup>33</sup> in the same novel. A character dashes out of a taxi "as a mortal sinner . . . might dive towards a confessional box";<sup>34</sup> when Major Scobie listens to a complaint from an African woman, we are told that "the interview was like a ritual between priest and server";<sup>35</sup> after an air raid, the newspapers pronounce "in calm, invariable words the Ite Missa Est."<sup>36</sup>



A case has been made that there are to be found Existentialist elements in Greene's fiction, especially in The Quiet American. There are, of course, two kinds of Existentialism, atheistic and Christian; the first to be found in Sartre, the second in the Protestant Kierkegaard and the Catholic Marcel. Christian and atheistic Existentialism both share what Unamuno calls the "tragic sense of life," and what is called existential angst. Both these characteristics may be found in Greene's fiction.

The atheistic existentialists argue that happiness is well-nigh impossible, and that man is abandoned in a meaningless universe. Greene seems to hold the former conviction, but would deny the second, since he postulates in his fiction that human life does have meaning, since man lives in a special relationship with God. Sarah in The End of The Affair makes the Kierkegaardian leap, through faith, to God.

The believing Christian, faced with the existence of sin and the prospect of hell, must share in existential angst. But Greene's Catholicism posits the presence of grace. Through grace, "the Catholic enjoys peace of mind; at least he is not overwhelmed by despair. Roman Catholicism nevertheless radically undermines all confidence in ourselves, and retains a certain degree of anguish which at times of spiritual crisis may become acute."<sup>37</sup> In Greene, the counterpart to Existentialist Absurdity becomes the irrationality of grace, and the absurdity of faith. Mauriac observes, "To the young contemporaries of Camus and Sartre, desperate prey to an absurd



liberty, Graham Greene will reveal, perhaps, that this absurdity is in truth only that of boundless love."<sup>38</sup> Sarah Miles believes, like Tertullian, because it is absurd; and indeed, what could be more absurd than the Christian myth, if looked at logically and rationally? Faith implies the renunciation of reason, and thus by definition is also absurd.

Existentialism also expresses doubt about man's status in the universe, and concomitant with this is a search to find out. Querry in A Burnt-Out Case is given a name expressive of doubt, and he makes a journey up the Congo to "find himself" -- with tragic results.

Finally, as Reinhardt points out, in Greene's fiction reappears Pascal's and Kierkegaard's idea of the "wager" and the "risk" and the idea further elaborated by Karl Jaspers that God is encountered in the "limit-situations" of human existence (sin, guilt, strife, suffering, death): Greene's major characters find themselves as well as God precisely in such "limit-situations," that is, in situations in which the individual risks all because he knows that in this ultimate either/or he stands to lose or win all.<sup>39</sup>



## CHAPTER IV

### THE UNIVERSE OF EVIL: BRIGHTON ROCK

Brighton Rock is a pivotal work. Janus-like, it looks backward to Greene's earlier books (especially A Gun For Sale), and forward to the more explicitly "Catholic" novels. Greene began by writing an entertainment, and ended by forcing a story of moral and spiritual consequence into the format of the thriller. The content is spiritual, the technique realistic; but in the other three novels of the "Catholic quartet" matter and form is more smoothly integrated. First listed as an entertainment (Greene's own classification for his works in which there is little underlying seriousness), Brighton Rock was subsequently reclassified as a novel. Greene explains:

Brighton Rock began as a detective story and continued, I am sometimes tempted to think, as an error of judgement. Until I published this novel I had like any other novelist been sometimes condemned with good enough reason as I fumbled at my craft, but now I was discovered to be -- detestable term -- a Catholic writer.<sup>1</sup>

The novel charts the progress of Pinkie Brown, the spiritually deformed and emotionally incomplete adolescent leader of a Brighton race-track gang, as he perilously and pridefully takes chances with his soul's salvation. This is the religious element; the entertainment factor deals with a story of murder and mayhem, suspense and manhunt, as Ida Arnold, symbol of human justice, relentlessly stalks Pinkie for the murder of Fred Hale,



a journalist. In A Gun For Sale, Raven had explained to Anne Crowder that Hale had betrayed Kite, the former leader of the gang now controlled by Pinkie. Hale dies of heart failure before Pinkie's gang can "carve" him, however. One member of the gang, the pallid Spicer, makes an error which is noted by Rose, a waitress at Snow's restaurant. Knowing that Rose's evidence is enough to hang him, Pinkie silences her through marriage. Meanwhile, Ida Arnold, a blowsy good-natured London tart to whom Hale had attached himself to escape the mob, is suspicious about his death. Ida, on her trail of vengeance, learns from the unwary Rose that Pinkie is implicated in Hale's death; and she keeps on harrying Rose in an attempt to get her to betray Pinkie. The latter part of the novel deals with Pinkie's attempts to "cover up" for the first murder: he kills the incompetent Spicer, and devises a suicide pact with Rose -- but without the intention of carrying out his half of the bargain. His plans are thwarted by Ida, who arrives with a policeman in the nick of time. Pinkie tries to escape, accidentally breaks his ever-present bottle of vitriol, the contents of which are flung by the wind back in his face. Blinded by the vitriol, crazed with terror, Pinkie stumbles over a cliff, and is "withdrawn suddenly by a hand out of any existence -- past or present, whipped away into zero -- nothing" (304).

Greene employs the omniscient point of view in this novel, which is structured into seven sections, with the narrative focus divided between Hale, Pinkie, Ida, Rose, Cubitt, and Spicer. Allott and Farris declare that Brighton Rock "shows a considerable technical



development. There is an attempt to deal with day-to-day existence in a special environment -- by contrast in the entertainments the succession of events calls for a rapid movement from place to place. There are also signs of the interplay and development of character."<sup>2</sup> Two technical devices used by Greene in this novel deserve some comment: the first is the catalogue, and the second is the use of the "camera eye."

Greene, writing on Beatrix Potter, observes that an element of her later style is "her love of a precise catalogue, her creation of atmosphere with still-life."<sup>3</sup> This is a technique which Greene has also mastered; Hoggart claims that "Greene uses the selectively typical catalogue as much as Auden, partly because they naturally tend to handle their material similarly, partly because they both began to write in the 'thirties when reportage made the catalogue very popular."<sup>4</sup> As an example of Greene's use of the catalogue, we find the following:

Ida went to the window and looked out, and again she saw only the Brighton she knew . . . two girls in beach pyjamas arm-in-arm, the buses going by to Rottingdean, a man selling papers, a woman with a shopping basket, a boy in a shabby suit, an excursion steamer edging off from the pier, which lay long, luminous and transparent, like a shrimp in the sunlight. (85-86)

Ida pays little attention to one item in the scene which she takes in -- the boy in the shabby suit, who fits so naturally into the sights of Brighton. But the boy is, of course, Pinkie Brown, to whose destruction Ida will later on devote her full attention. The reader of the novel is ironically aware of this fact.



The catalogue also allows Greene to use selected details to build up a composite picture. Pinkie has just taken Rose on her first date:

"This is better than going home," Rose said.

"Where's home?"

"Nelson Place. Do you know it?"

"Oh, I've passed through," he said airily, but he could have drawn its plan as accurately as a surveyor on the turf: the barred and battlemented Salvation Army gaff at the corner: his own home beyond in Paradise Piece: the houses which looked as if they had passed through an intensive bombardment, flapping gutters and glassless windows, an iron bedstead rusting in a front garden, the smashed and wasted ground in front where houses had been pulled down for model flats which had never gone up. (109)

The catalogue of dereliction paints accurately and economically the physical environment of the slum in which Pinkie had grown up. In the incident where Ida goes to interview Molly Pink, the spotty girl to whom Hale had desperately attached himself at Brighton in an attempt to escape Pinkie, is again found Greene's close attention to detail:

The room was lined from floor to ceiling with files. A little window disclosed through the undisturbed dust of many years another block of buildings with the same arrangement of windows staring dustily back like a reflection. A dead fly hung in a broken web. (45)

The detailed description, the still-life effect is there, but without, however, the implied moral comment to be found in the preceding quotation from the novel.

The second stylistic device utilised in the novel, as mentioned earlier, is the camera eye. This device allows for transitions from one part of the action to another, and is the equivalent of the editing and montage of the film-maker. Just as a film is made up of a



succession or sequence of images, so too is Greene's novel made up of a succession of scenes. The camera eye "enables Greene to shift rapidly from scene to scene and suspend one element of the action while he takes up another."<sup>5</sup>

The problem with the camera is that "it is a mechanical instrument and lacks both intelligence and feeling. What passes before it the camera records with utter indifference."<sup>6</sup> Greene, while recording details as dispassionately as a camera, improves on the camera view by making it select "its detail on the basis of moral significance."<sup>7</sup>

In the close-up, the camera is placed close to what it is photographing. Here, from the novel, is a description of the process, and also the process itself; the ageing gangster Spicer is looking at himself in a glass:

suddenly there was his own face in the glass -- the coarse black hair greying at the roots, the small eruptions on the face, the bloodshot eyeballs, and it occurred to him, as if he were looking at a close-up on a screen, that that was the kind of face a nark might have, a man who grassed to the bogies. (99)

In the following illustrations, the roving eye of the camera picks out significant details. At Brewer's, where he has gone to extort protection money from the terrified bookmaker, Pinkie

looked with contempt down the narrow hall -- the shell case converted into an umbrella stand, the moth-eaten stag's head bearing on one horn a bowler hat, a steel helmet used for ferns. (66)

Ida Arnold, interviewing Rose at Snow's restaurant, went in through the open door. Three iron bedsteads, a chest of drawers, two chairs and a couple of cheap mirrors: she took it all in and Rose against the wall as far as she could get, watching the door with terror. (148-49)



Ida Arnold, at the Cosmopolitan Hotel

swivelled her eyes round the elegant furnishing of the Pompadour Boudoir. They picked out like a searchlight a cushion, a couch, the thin clerkly mouth of the man opposite her. (179)

Greene had earlier experimented with the thriller format in Stamboul Train, and in his collection of essays he pays tribute to John Buchan, who was "the first to realize the enormous dramatic value of adventure in familiar circumstances."<sup>8</sup> The "adventure" is here set in Brighton, with its fun-filled atmosphere and holiday mood. With a fine irony, Greene shows that the gaiety is largely spurious, and that the real Brighton is a world of "cheap amusements, the Pullman cars, the unloving weekends in gaudy hotels, and the sadness after coition" (274).

Brighton Rock adheres to the formula that the thriller exposes "the bizarre, the grotesque, the brutal, the ferocious," and that the detective element in the thriller provides for "analytical emphasis."<sup>9</sup> Characters and incidents in the novel lend conviction to this view. The sadistically bizarre is provided by Pinkie's callously pulling the wings off a fly to the refrain of "she loves me, she loves me not" (116); the grotesque by Mr Prewitt, the shady lawyer who "wriggles with indigestion" (261) and arranges Pinkie's marriage to Rose; the brutal and ferocious can be found in the murders, the razor slashings and the deceptive calm of a Brighton which hides the violent emotions and deeds of men outside the law.

On the religious level, Greene uses the thriller to give his view of the world, which he sees as infected with the sins and crimes



of postlapsarian man. We have seen that Greene had voyaged to West Africa in an attempt to discover "at which point we went astray"; and Brighton Rock shows to what extent man has fallen. The time of the novel's events is Whitsuntide, the period which, in the Church's calendar, commemorates the coming of the Holy Ghost; but the Whit-Monday crowd on the race-tracks of Brighton, if challenged, would certainly have denied any acquaintance with the Holy Spirit; and Greene sees Brighton as the world in miniature, a modern world which lives "in the fog belt of melodrama,"<sup>10</sup> a world in which violence and brutality are the accepted everyday norms. In The Ministry of Fear, Greene had already indicted the modern world; Arthur Rowe tells his mother, "Let me lend you the History of Contemporary Society. It's in hundreds of volumes but most of them are sold in cheap editions: Death in Picadilly, The Ambassador's Diamonds, The Theft of the Naval Papers . . ."<sup>11</sup> In the same novel, Rowe comments on the relationship between the thriller and the real world: "Thrillers are like life -- more like life than you are . . . You used to laugh at the books . . . about spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motor-chases, but, dear, that's real life . . ."<sup>12</sup> In the spy-spoofing entertainment, Our Man in Havana, art does not mirror life so much as life mirrors art; for Beatrice, Wormold's secretary, reminds him: "We're back in the Boys' Own Paper world, that's all. You can count yourself lucky. . . . It might have been the Sunday Mirror . . . The world is modelled after the popular magazines nowadays."<sup>13</sup>



In addition to the hero and the villain, the thriller usually contains chases and pursuits, and as a concession to morality, poetic justice assures that evil is punished and good is rewarded. These elements can be found in Greene's novel: if it has no hero, at least it has a villain; poetic justice is achieved by Pinkie's death; and Greene employs the pursuit motif as Pinkie is chased by Ida Arnold, representing human justice.

Harper, in discussing the categories of the thriller, points out that the thriller depends heavily on mood and situation, and that a good opening is essential.<sup>14</sup> Greene provides this, in the very first sentence of the novel: "Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him" (1). The reader's expectations of a "good story" are aroused from the outset; who are "they"? and why would they want to murder Hale? Hale, hunted and defenceless, is described as having "bitten nails and inky fingers" (2), and in five words Greene is able to depict the man's fright and hysteria (the bitten nails) and his profession of journalist (the inky fingers).

Also in the thriller are to be found tension, chaos, violence, terror and danger. And Greene finds in the thriller, with its depiction of a landscape of violence and terror, a form by means of which the realities of life today may be expressed. Present in the thriller, also, can be seen a metaphysic of evil; in Brighton Rock Greene, like Hawthorne in "Young Goodman Brown," seems bent on exploring the "deep mystery of sin"; and by depicting the criminal and warped nature of



Pinkie Brown, the slums of Nelson Place where ignorance and evil fester, and the sinister reality behind the painted facade of a glamorous Brighton, Greene in fictional form shows the reality of sin and evil.

Moral values are established in the novel; in the words of Harper, "Thriller literature is crisis literature, and has arisen in the same century as a crisis theology and an existential philosophy, as a response to the crises of our civilization."<sup>15</sup> The thriller, "in the language of Karl Jaspers' existentialist philosophy . . . is the literature of boundary situations."<sup>16</sup> Jaspers, like Kierkegaard, shows man confronted with imperative choices, and decisions must be made on how he is to live his life. Pinkie is similarly faced with the choice of Good or Evil, God or the Devil. "One choice means death or the collapse of our personality, the other means life, literally life, in which we shall never be the same again."<sup>17</sup>

In terms of Greene's schema, an eschatological significance is given to the novel, since in Brighton Rock the four last things -- Judgment, Purgatory, Heaven, Hell -- are realities to be faced; and Pinkie Brown consciously chooses Hell and damnation because, to his way of thinking, he "couldn't picture eternity except in terms of pain" (118). Heaven was a word: Hell the only reality he could trust. Unlike Greene -- who in The Lawless Roads tells us: "One began to believe in heaven because one believed in hell, but for a long while it was only hell one could picture with a certain intimacy"<sup>18</sup> -- for Pinkie the existence of Heaven is but problematical:



"Of course it's true," the Boy said. "What else could there be?" he went scornfully on. "Why," he said, "it's the only thing that fits. These atheists, they don't know nothing. Of course there's Hell. Flames and damnation," he said with his eyes on the dark shifting water and the lightning and the lamps going out above the black struts of the Palace Pier, "torments."

"And Heaven too," Rose said with anxiety, while the rain fell interminably on.

"Oh, maybe," the Boy said, "maybe." (61-62)

Nathan Scott, theologian-critic whose work has done so much to bridge the gap between literature and religion, and to illumine the relationship between the two, remarks of the novel:

In the book of 1938 it became clear that the forlorn world of dereliction that Greene had been portraying in his earlier novels was not simply the squalid arena of futility and meaninglessness that has been so thoroughly explored in modern fiction but was, rather, a world of dimensions, not truly to be understood except sub specie aeternitatis.<sup>19</sup>

In Greene's novel, the presence of God can be detected -- paradoxically, by the presence of evil. For Greene, it would appear adopts the position of Dostoevsky, as summed up by Berdyaev:

The existence of evil is a proof of the existence of God. If the world consisted wholly and uniquely of goodness and righteousness there would be no need for God, for the world itself would be God. God is, because evil is. And that means God is because freedom is.<sup>20</sup>

It is with this paradox in mind, then -- that the presence of evil implies the existence of God -- that the religious implications of Brighton Rock may fruitfully be explored. For when God is brought in, a new dimension is also added, since all things relate in the Christian schema, to God as maker of all things. Pinkie by his sins is so far cut off from God, that he is aware in what desperate plight he is.

Greene's portrait of Pinkie owes much to his boyhood reading of Marjorie Bowen, who had given him his pattern of "perfect evil



walking the world where perfect good can never walk again."<sup>21</sup> Pinkie, wholly evil, is so wrapped up in himself that he does not care for anyone -- he rejects the love of Rose (perhaps the outcome might have been different had he responded to her) and the love of God. We first see him through Hale's eyes -- "a face of starved intensity, a kind of hideous and unnatural pride" (4). Constant references are made to "his grey eyes which had an effect of heartlessness like an old man's in which human feeling has died" (5) and to "the slatey eyes which were touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went" (22).

Pinkie has the demonic pride of Satan; and like Satan who gave up heaven for hell, Pinkie also will not serve, but like some perverse celebrant at a Black Mass intones his creed, "Credo in unum Satanum" (205). His pride is very much in evidence; after a detective has warned him to watch his step, Pinkie meditates retribution:

There was poison in his veins, though he grinned and bore it. He was going to show the world. They thought because he was only seventeen . . . he jerked his narrow shoulders back at the memory that he'd killed his man, and these bogies who thought they were clever weren't clever enough to discover that. He trailed the clouds of his own glory after him: hell lay about him in his infancy. He was ready for more deaths. (81)

One is reminded of Satan, whose "sense of injur'd merit" led him to rebel against God; and Pinkie's mad rush to hell mirrors Satan's dreadful choice -- "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n."

Pinkie, in his pride and egotism, reminds us also of Edward's observation, in The Cocktail Party, that



Hell is oneself  
Hell is alone . . .

His relationship with others, and especially with the pathetic Rose, can be expressed in the ontology of Martin Buber, as formulated in his I and Thou.<sup>22</sup> Buber explains that there is an "I-Thou" relationship and an "I-It" relationship. The former is a relationship between persons or equals; the latter is a relationship between a person and a thing. With Pinkie, there is never a person-to-person relationship; Rose for him is not a person, but a pawn to be used in protecting himself from the reaches of the law.

Similarly, he has no personal relationship with the other members of his gang, since he can dispassionately plan the murder of Spicer, and tolerates rather than likes, Dallow. Even his two fumbling attempts at sex are engaged in for the wrong reasons. He tries to seduce the willing Sylvie, Spicer's girl, because she knows the "game," and he thinks it important that he should learn. His sexual intimacies with Rose on their wedding night spring, not from a desire to be loving and tender, but from a desire to dominate. Pinkie is what Buber designates an Eigenwesen, the solitary individual who "lives for himself," who "becomes incapable of listening and responding," and who "defines all things in relation to himself."<sup>23</sup> Greene sees Pinkie's inadequacies as resulting from his environment, and also from a dormant imagination -- he "couldn't see through other people's eyes, or feel with their nerves" (52).

Critics have objected that in comparing this figure of evil



with the bourgeois Ida Arnold, Greene has subtly weighted the scales in favour of Pinkie, and has nothing but contempt for the hearty and jolly Ida. Ida throughout the novel is described in hardly very flattering terms, and Greene's descriptions of her at times verge on caricature:

Her large clear eyes (a spot of drink now and then didn't affect them) told nothing, gave away no secrets. Camaraderie, good nature, cheeriness fell like shutters before a plate-glass window. You could only guess at the goods behind: sound old-fashioned hall-marked goods, justice, an eye for an eye, law and order, capital punishment, a bit of fun now and then, nothing nasty, nothing shady, nothing you'd be ashamed to own, nothing mysterious. (92)

In that description, Greene has suggested that Ida belongs to the tribe of the unimaginative and the conventional, who are limited in their outlook on life. In the quotation following, in which the sting lies in the last phrase, Greene manages to suggest that it is somehow offensive to be healthy and to love life in the way Ida does:

She was cheery, she was healthy, she could get a bit lit with the best of them. She liked a good time, her big breasts bore their carnality frankly down the Old Steyne, but you had only to look at her to know that you could rely on her. She wouldn't tell tales to your wife, she wouldn't remind you next morning of what you wanted to forget, she was honest, she was kindly, she belonged to the great middle law-abiding class, her amusements were their amusements, her superstitions their superstitions . . . she had no more love for anyone than they had. (96)

Greene speaks of her "merciless compassion" (148), and the adjective subtly undercuts and detracts from the good associated with the noun. Ida is depicted as ordering justice "as if she were ordering a pound of tea" (244); and in the quotations following, I have emphasized other disparaging authorial comments:



Her big prosperous carnal face hung itself with smiles. (244)

She laughed resolutely. (244)

Ida hooked on another smile, as you hook on a wreath. (246)

Vengeance was Ida's, just as much as reward was Ida's, the soft gluey mouth affixed in taxis, the warm handclasp in cinemas, the only reward there was. And vengeance and reward -- they both were fun. (41)

Greene's treatment of Ida has annoyed the critics. Braybrooke, for example, speaks of the novel's "partisan spirit" and says that "it makes for a form of Catholic discrimination amongst the various characters."<sup>24</sup> Atkins comments, "We are led to believe that a bad Catholic, though not morally better than a good Protestant, actually lives on a superior level of being."<sup>25</sup>

Brighton Rock is based on a paradox. The reader may well ask himself: Why is Greene so partial to Pinkie? After all, Pinkie is a murderer, and he tries later on to get Rose to kill herself. He is a mobster, with unpleasing personal traits. He is guilty of selective Catholicism, taking from it what fits in with his own inclinations and rejecting those things which do not: he believes in Satan, hell, and damnation, but rejects love both sacred and profane -- that of Rose and that of God. In the characterization of Pinkie, Greene suggests not that a bad Catholic is better than a good Protestant, as Atkins thinks, but that a bad Catholic is somehow to be preferred over someone who, although not involved in serious wrongdoing, yet has no sense of the religious. This is a highly dubious notion, of course; and George Orwell shrewdly pinpoints its moral flaws when he observes that



it is impossible not to feel a sort of snobbishness in Mr Greene's attitude. . . . He appears to share the idea, which has been floating around ever since Baudelaire, that there is something rather distingue about being damned; Hell is a sort of high-class nightclub, entry to which is reserved for Catholics only, since the others, the non-Catholics, are too ignorant to be held guilty, like the beasts that perish. We are carefully informed that Catholics are no better than anybody else; they even, perhaps, have a tendency to be worse, since their temptations are greater. . . . But all the while -- drunken, lecherous, criminal or damned outright -- the Catholics retain their superiority, since they alone know the meaning of good and evil.<sup>26</sup>

Orwell has put his finger on the crux of the matter. Greene, in his portrayal of Pinkie, is working within a tradition, that of the "sanctified sinner," used by European Catholic writers like Mauriac and Bernanos, and also by the American Catholic novelist, Flannery O'Connor. Orwell, in the article just quoted, goes on to state what he considers the absurdities inherent in the use of the "sanctified sinner":

The cult of the sanctified sinner seems to me to be frivolous, and underneath it there probably lies a weakening of belief, for when people really believed in Hell, they were not so fond of striking graceful attitudes on its brink. More to the point, trying to clothe theological speculations in flesh and blood, it produces psychological absurdities. . . . In Brighton Rock . . . the central situation is incredible, since it presupposes that the most brutishly stupid person can, merely by having been brought up a Catholic, be capable of great intellectual subtlety.<sup>27</sup>

Orwell's strictures cannot lightly be ignored, and the paradox crumbles under the weight Greene expects it to sustain. Greene's point is that Ida's view of life, with its insistence on "right and wrong" and its appeal to a wholly secular, though ethical, norm of conduct is in the end superficial and inadequate, since it is man-made. Pinkie's view of life is seen in relationship to the terms "good and evil" which have as their standard of reference God or some



supernatural force. Thus, in Greene's and Pinkie's view, a system of conduct based on divine norms is superior to a purely man-made ethical system. It could be argued, however, that "right and wrong" are but aspects of "good and evil," and that Ida (spiritual nonentity though she might be), at least sticks to her man-made code, while Pinkie deliberately disobeys the divine mandates.

Ida is the polar opposite of Rose and Pinkie. Ida believes that people never change -- "I've never changed. It's like those sticks of rock: bite it all the way down, you'll still read Brighton. That's human nature" (247). Rose suggests that people can change, through confession and repentance, but Ida blandly returns, "That's just religion. Believe me, it's the world we got to deal with" (247). Ida is operating on the purely secular level. Her name itself carries overtones of an unchristian civilization -- pagan Greece; while Rose reminds us of the Virgin Mary, the "mystical Rose" whose intercession we implore. Ida believes neither in God, nor in an after-life: She wasn't religious. She didn't believe in heaven or hell, only in ghosts, ouija boards, tables which rapped and little inept voices speaking plaintively of flowers. Let Papists treat death with flippancy: life wasn't so important perhaps to them as what came after: but to her death was the end of everything. (40)

Her distance from Rose and Pinkie is stressed:

It was as if she were in a strange country: the typical Englishwoman abroad. She hadn't even got a phrase book. She was as far from either of them as she was from Hell -- or Heaven. (156)

Ida, then, receives Greene's and Pinkie's scorn precisely because she is spiritually unaware. As Mesnet says, "Ida exemplifies the only simple solution -- the absence of any faith. She is reduced



almost to a symbol, a kind of mythological embodiment of an idea rather than a living character."<sup>28</sup> Ida has no conception of sin and guilt; Rose observes:

"Right and wrong. That's what she talks about. I've heard her at the table. Right and wrong. As if she knew." She whispered with contempt, "Oh, she wouldn't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried." (139)

And again it is suggested that Rose and Pinkie are attuned to spiritual reality while Ida is not, when Rose declares:

"We were all Romans in Nelson Place. You believe in things. Like Hell. But you can see she don't believe in a thing." She said bitterly, "You can tell the world's all dandy with her." (110)

This is why, in Greene's view, the Pinkie who doesn't pray and who doesn't go to Mass, but at least has perceptions of God and a beyond, is superior to the neutral Ida, with her ouija boards and her "air of compassion and comprehension . . . like a rank cheap perfume" (292). Pinkie, in a conversation with Rose, comes to the conclusion that Ida is "just nothing" (157).

Greene believes then, that today's world is but imperfectly attuned to spiritual realities. In such a world, therefore, where few can claim, like Eliot's Celia Coplestone, to be haunted by a sense of sin, Greene is positing this paradox: that the person who is aware of sin and guilt, and yet chooses to do evil rather than good, is superior to a person like the cheery Ida who is the embodiment of "shallow insensitivity and spiritual vacancy."<sup>29</sup> Pinkie's outlook is a far cry from Dallow's, for instance; Ted Dallow declares of hell: "I don't believe what my eyes don't see" (265). And Pinkie's



conception of God is different from that of the Protestant minister who officiates at the cremation of Fred Hale, and who keeps referring to the "universal spirit" (40). Greene is indebted throughout for this attitude to Charles Péguy and to T.S. Eliot. In his essay on Baudelaire, Eliot has this to say:

When Baudelaire's Satanism is dissociated from its less creditable paraphernalia, it amounts to a dim intuition of a part, but a very important part, of Christianity. Satanism itself . . . was an attempt to get into Christianity by the back door. Genuine blasphemy, genuine in spirit and not purely verbal, is the product of partial belief, and is as impossible to the complete atheist as to the perfect Christian. It is a way of affirming belief.<sup>30</sup>

Greene's Pinkie is also reminiscent of Baudelaire, as he continually ponders over the prospect of damnation. What Eliot has to say on this is again apposite:

the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation -- of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because at least it gives some significance to living.<sup>31</sup>

Pinkie is committed, even though his commitment is to hell rather than to heaven; and he is aware of the consequences of his choice, in a way that Ida Arnold could never be. For Ida is reminiscent of Hazel Motes' uncomprehending landlady in Flannery O'Connor's novel, Wise Blood. Of this landlady, Miss O'Connor writes: "She was not religious or morbid, for which every day she thanked her stars. She would credit a person who had that streak with anything, though . . ."<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Eliot points out the necessity for commitment to some choice:



So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing; at least, we exist. It is true that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned. Baudelaire was man enough for damnation: whether he is damned is, of course, another question, and we are not prevented from praying for his repose. In all his humiliating traffic with other beings, he walked secure in this high vocation, that he was capable of a damnation denied to the politicians and the newspaper editors of Paris.<sup>33</sup>

As further documentation of Greene's thoughts on the matter, it is necessary to quote from his essay on Frederick Rolfe: "The greatest saints have been men with more than a normal capacity for evil, and the most vicious men have sometimes narrowly evaded sanctity."<sup>34</sup> This is a highly questionable sentiment, and were Greene asked to prove it, he would have considerable difficulty in doing so. Pinkie has certain things in common with Rolfe; the desire to be a priest, and the quest toward damnation:

Rolfe's vice was spiritual more than it was carnal: it might be said he was a pander and a swindler, because he cared for nothing but his faith. He would be a priest or nothing, so nothing it had to be and he was not ashamed to live on his friends; if he could not have Heaven, he would have Hell, and the last footprints seem to point unmistakably towards the Inferno.<sup>35</sup>

That Eliot's influence had a bearing on Greene's treatment of the "sanctified sinner" theme, is proved when Greene himself quotes Eliot in the same essay on Rolfe: "Most people are only a very little alive; and to awaken them to the spiritual is a very great responsibility: it is only when they are so awakened that they are capable of real Good, but at the same time they become first capable of Evil."<sup>36</sup>



The idea that "the sinner is at the very heart of Christendom," and that by sinning man is but stressing his humanity, is an idea that Greene borrows from Péguy. In the New Testament, also, it is of course stressed that Christ is the special friend of sinners: Péguy pushes this idea to extremes, with the result that he enunciates an incredible idea -- "Littéralement celui qui est pécheur, celui qui commet un péché est déjà chrétien, est en cela même chrétien. On pourrait presque dire est un bon chrétien."<sup>37</sup> Greene affixes as epigraph to The Heart of The Matter, a statement from Péguy: "Nul n'est aussi compétent que le pécheur en matière de chrétienté. Nul, si ce n'est le saint." Péguy goes on: "Et en principe, c'est le même homme. . . . Le pécheur tend la main au saint, donne la main au saint, puisque le saint donne la main au pécheur. Et tous ensemble, l'un par l'autre, ils remontent jusqu'à Jésus, ils font une chaîne qui remonte jusqu'à Jésus, une chaîne aux doigts indéliables."<sup>38</sup>

That the character and writings of Péguy interested Greene can be surmised from the fact that in The Lawless Roads, Greene makes a passing comment on Péguy's challenging God on behalf of the damned; and in an essay on Leon Bloy, Greene comments, "Unlike his contemporary Péguy, Bloy would never have risked damnation himself in order to save another soul."<sup>39</sup> In addition to borrowing the "sanctified sinner" concept, Greene also takes over from Péguy the idea of a person willing his own damnation to secure the salvation of another.

Greene uses the damnation motif in Brighton Rock, in The Power and The Glory and in The Heart of The Matter. The concept is



adumbrated in the entertainment, The Ministry of Fear. In The Power and The Glory, the whiskey priest makes the offer of his own damnation for the salvation of his illegitimate daughter; Major Scobie in The Heart of The Matter offers his damnation on behalf of his wife and his mistress. In The Ministry of Fear, Arthur Rowe reflects, "Wasn't it better to take part in the crimes of people you loved, if it was necessary to hate as they did, and if that were the end of everything suffer damnation with them, rather than be saved alone?"<sup>40</sup> From the equivocal character of Péguy, as well as from the Frenchman's writings, Greene has obviously drawn the idea of the bargain of damnation. This will become apparent as Péguy's life and works are examined, and their influence discovered in the incidents of Brighton Rock.

Greene's heroine, Rose, knows that Pinkie is evil, and she marries him with the full knowledge that he is a murderer. After their wedding night, she reflects, "the thought of what she might have let herself in for came like a sense of glory. A child . . . and that child would have a child . . . it was like raising an army of friends for Pinkie. If They damned him and her, They'd have to deal with them, too. There was no end to what the two of them had done last night upon the bed: it was an eternal act" (249).

In the tavern where they have stopped on their way to consummate their suicide pact, Rose thinks: "He was going to damn himself, but she was going to show them that they couldn't damn him without damning her too. There was nothing he could do, she wouldn't do: she felt capable of sharing any murder. . . . She felt



responsibility move in her breasts; she wouldn't let him go into that darkness alone" (285). At the actual moment of decision, she considers the alternatives:

What will he do . . . if I don't . . . shoot? Would he shoot himself alone, without her? Then he would be damned, and she wouldn't have her chance of being damned too, of showing Them they couldn't pick and choose. To go on living for years . . . you couldn't tell what life would do to you in making you meek, good, repentant. . . . You could win to the evil side suddenly, in a moment of despair or passion, but through a long life the guardian good drove you remorselessly towards the crib, the "happy death." (301)

Rose does not, however, kill herself, since her guardian angel "tempted her to virtue like a sin" (302); and Pinkie dies alone, falling off the cliff, with the vitriol streaming down his face. Later, Rose goes to confession, but tells the priest defiantly: "'I wish I'd killed myself. I ought to 'ave killed myself.' The old man began to say something, but she interrupted him. 'I'm not asking for absolution. I don't want absolution. I want to be like him, damned'" (307). And Greene adds, "She would have found the courage to kill herself if she hadn't been afraid that somewhere in that obscure countryside of death they might miss each other -- mercy operating somehow for one and not for the other" (307-08). She wonders at the comforting words of the priest, who tells her of a Frenchman who thought as she does:

The old man suddenly began to talk, whistling every now and then and blowing eucalyptus through the grill. He said, "There was a man, a Frenchman, you wouldn't know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all through his life, because he couldn't bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation." She listened with astonishment. He said, "This man decided that if any soul was going to damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments, he never married his wife in church. I don't know, my child, but some people think he was --



well, a saint. I think he died in what we are told is mortal sin -- I'm not sure: it was during the war: perhaps . . ." He sighed and whistled, bending his old head. (308)

It is obvious that parallels can be drawn between incidents in Greene's novel and events in Péguy's life. Péguy's marriage was not solemnised in church, and Rose marries Pinkie in a Registry office. And more to the point, Rose, like Péguy, wishes to be damned if Pinkie is going to be damned. The Church's teaching on Hell filled Péguy with consternation, and he refused to accept the idea of damnation. He "desired to rescue from Hell not a single soul but all the lost souls. It was a prodigious error which reveals at the same time his inadequate theology and his noble heart."<sup>41</sup>

In Péguy's Jeanne D'Arc, Joan worries continually about the souls of the damned. Addressing God, she says,

Pourtant, mon Dieu, quand je pense qu'il y a des âmes qui se damnent; quand je pense qu'il y avait des âmes qui n'étaient pas encore damnées au moment où j'ai commencé à vous dire cette prière et qui sont damnées à présent pour la mort éternelle; quand je pense qu'à présent que je vous parle toutes mes paroles vous trouvent occupé à damner des âmes, pardonnez-moi, mon Dieu, si<sup>42</sup> je dis un blasphème: quand je pense à cela, je ne peux plus prier.

In Le Mystere de la Charite de Jeanne d'Arc, Joan, like Rose is willing to damn her soul if only the damned could be saved:

-- S'il faut donc, pour sauver de la flamme éternelle  
Les corps des morts damnés s'affolant de souffrance,  
Laisser longtemps mon corps à la souffrance humaine,  
Mon Dieu, gardez mon corps à la souffrance humaine.<sup>43</sup>

When Rose exclaims to Pinkie, "I don't care . . . I'd rather burn with you than be like her [Ida Arnold]" (139), she is articulating the same reply that the nun, Hauviette, made to Joan: "Il ne faut pas sauver



son âme comme on sauve un trésor . . . Il faut se sauver ensemble.

Il faut arriver ensemble chez le bon Dieu. . . . Il ne faut pas arriver trouver le bon Dieu les uns sans les autres."<sup>44</sup>

God is present, by implication or by inference, in the world of Brighton Rock. Contrasting with the sordid reality of the evil and sin in Brighton, God the suprasensible reality can be discovered from the evidence of several things occurring in the novel. God can be inferred from the presence of his agent, the aged priest to whom Rose goes to confess. The importance of the priesthood as the channel through which the sacraments are conferred, and as the mediator between God and man, is stressed by Greene even more in The Power and The Glory. Here in Brighton Rock, the priest gives advice and comfort, and holds out the hope of absolution to the rebellious Rose.

In a roundabout way, too, the "finger of God" -- to use Mauriac's phrase -- can be seen in the retributive justice of Ida Arnold. But the main idea underlying the story is the Catholic moral teaching regarding human acts. For however insignificant one's acts may be, one has to account for them finally to God. In terms of moral theology, the novel is concerned with the actions of Pinkie and the eternal consequences of such actions. In the terms of moral theology, a human act is "one which proceeds from man by virtue of his free determination." In assessing human acts, the individual's responsibility is "proportionate to the degree of knowledge and freedom which he enjoys."<sup>45</sup> Obviously an insane person cannot be held legally or morally responsible for his actions; but there is no hint in the novel



that Pinkie is insane -- and therefore Sean O'Faolain's statement that Pinkie is "entirely unpersuasive except as something strayed out of a mental home,"<sup>46</sup> is critically worthless. For there is no doubt that Pinkie knew fully what he was doing, and the consequences, both moral and legal, of his acts. He was exercising a free choice when he plotted to murder Hale, and the murder of Spicer was also a free act, for which he deserves punishment, both secular and divine. This theme significantly relates to the lines from The Witch of Edmonton, which Greene appends to the novel to serve as an epigraph. The play is attributed to Dekker, and the words are taken from Frank Thorney's speech in Act IV, Scene 2, where he regretfully wishes that an individual did not have to be responsible for his actions; if only, as Frank remorsefully puts it, one didn't have to

Answer how well or ill he steer'd his soul,  
By Heaven's or by Hell's Compass; how he put in  
(Loosing bless'd Goodness shore) at such a sin;  
Nor how life's dear provision he has spent:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
This were a fine Raign,  
To do ill, and not hear of it again.

Dekker's play, like Greene's novel, revolves around crime and punishment, both stress the moral implications of human acts. Pinkie is a free man: he could have chosen not to kill. He knows that he is doing wrong, but has the idea of repenting at the eleventh hour: when he was thoroughly secure, he could begin to think of making peace, of going home, and his heart weakened with a faint nostalgia for the tiny dark confessional box, the priest's voice, and the people waiting under the statue, before the bright lights burning down in the pink glasses, to be made safe from eternal pain. Eternal pain had not meant much to him: now it meant the slash of razor blades infinitely prolonged. (132-33)



Of Hell, Pinkie tells Rose, "You don't need to think of it -- not before you die" (110). He knows furthermore that there is no salvation without repentance, confession and absolution: "You could be saved between the stirrup and the ground, but you couldn't be saved if you didn't repent and he hadn't time . . . to feel the least remorse" (130). For he discovers that one might not have the energy to repent because "habit held you closely while you died" (132).

All this notwithstanding, Pinkie is not a wholly plausible character. He is too obviously built up by Greene to fit the symbolic contours of his novel. Greene, for example, has been psychologically false in assigning a profound theological perception to Pinkie Brown, the boy from the slums; what youth, with Pinkie's background, can make subtle distinctions between good and evil and right and wrong? Or can have enough intelligence and education to parody the Nicene Creed? Would a gang of adult toughs meekly accept the leadership of a puny adolescent, submitting "like children before his ageless eyes" (25)? The thoughtful reader must have some profound misgivings about Pinkie. However, his symbolic role in the novel is clear enough: Pinkie, like Satan, exemplifies the old priest's saying to Rose, "Corruptio optimi est pessima" (309). Pinkie, like Rolfe, wanted to be a priest -- although for the wrong reasons. He tells Rose, "'Why, I was in a choir once,' the Boy confided and suddenly he began to sing in his spoilt boy's voice: 'Agnus dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.' In his voice a whole lost world moved -- the lighted corner below the organ, the smell of incense and laundered surplices,



and the music" (61). R.W.B. Lewis suggests that Brighton Rock is "the story of a saint's life in reverse."<sup>47</sup> And indeed, Pinkie slides precipitously down the slope of hell, whereas the whiskey priest in The Power and The Glory climbs towards heaven.

Pinkie is incapable of responding to goodness. He sees Rose only in terms of her physical defects; he dislikes her, but recognizes the goodness in her: "She was good, he'd discovered that, and he was damned: they were made for each other" (155); "she was a good kid, she was bounded by her goodness; there were things she couldn't imagine . . ." (170). The Pinkie-Rose relationship exemplifies St Augustine's teaching that good can exist without evil, but evil cannot exist without good.

Apart from the example of Rose, Pinkie has other guides to show him how he should act. There is the glimpse he has, for example, of an old woman at prayer:

He heard a whisper, looked sharply round . . . In an alley between two shops, an old woman sat upon the ground; he could just see the rotting and discoloured face: it was like the sight of damnation. Then he heard the whisper, "Blessed art thou among women," saw the grey fingers fumbling at the beads. This was not one of the damned: he watched with horrified fascination: this was one of the saved. (234)

It is to be noted that throughout the novel, Pinkie prays for peace, never for God's mercy. Although he does not deserve God's mercy, we cannot be sure that it is withheld from him. Although Pinkie dies in mortal sin and deserves hell, the priest at the conclusion of the novel holds out hope to Rose: "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the . . . appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of



God" (308). And indeed, there are extenuating circumstances in Pinkie's case. He has unhappy childhood memories of "a cracked bell ringing, a child weeping under the cane" (299); and because of childhood traumas, he sees the world in terms of "gaol . . . not knowing where to get some money. Worms and cataract, cancer. You hear 'em shrieking from the upper windows -- children being born. It's dying slowly" (283). At his home in the slums, he early identifies sex with lust, and has a horror of and revulsion from it, as he watches his parents "'every Saturday night . . . bouncing and ploughing'" (204). It is out of a puritanical sensibility that he swore to escape the entrapment of sex by becoming a priest. When he visits the Wilsons to propose marriage to Rose, and sees the dirty house, the unlit fire, and Rose's parents' sulky displeasure, Pinkie thinks, "nobody could say he hadn't done right to get away from this, to commit any crime" (177). On the other hand, Rose came from the same background, but is not shown as succumbing to its influence.

But Pinkie, although monstrously evil, is not wholly evil, and there are moments when he can be touched. He can weep, for instance, and can envision "hopelessly out of reach -- a limitless freedom: no fear, no hatred, no envy. It was as if he were dead and were remembering the effect of a good confession, the words of absolution . . ." (223). So that although Pinkie by his crimes deserves hell, there is no certainty that he goes there. As the old priest tells Rose, "The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy" (308). Pinkie may have been touched by grace at the moment before



death, and may have repented. The final destiny of Pinkie is left ambiguous; to quote Greene's mentor, Péguy: "Mais je sais aussi . . . que la grâce est retorse et qu'elle est inattendue. Et aussi qu'elle est opiniâtre comme une femme, et comme une femme tenace et comme une femme tenante. Quand on la met à la porte, elle rentre par la fenêtre. Les hommes que Dieu veut avoir, il les a . . . Quand la grâce ne vient pas droit, c'est qu'elle vient de travers. Quand elle ne vient pas à droite, c'est qu'elle vient à gauche."<sup>48</sup>



## CHAPTER V

### THE PRESENCE OF GRACE: THE POWER AND THE GLORY

In 1938 Greene travelled through Mexico, in the provinces of Chiapas and Tabasco, collecting information on religious persecution in that country. The result of this journeying was a travel book, The Lawless Roads; and a novel, The Power and The Glory.

When Greene visited Mexico, Cardenas was President, but the anti-religious persecution begun by President Calles in September 1926 was still in force. The Mexican Constitution openly declared against religion, and Greene quotes an extract from Article 3 which reads: "The education imparted by the State shall be a socialistic one and, in addition to excluding all religious doctrine, shall combat fanaticism and prejudices by organising its instruction and activities in a way that shall permit the creation in youth of an exact and rational conception of the Universe and of social life" (LR, 83).

In the state of Tabasco, the local dictator, General Garrido Canabal, had begun a policy of destroying churches; and his organised militia, the Red Shirts, also engaged in the task of hunting down and executing priests.

In Chiapas, Greene ruefully notes that no churches were allowed



open, and that the Bishop was in exile. The state of San Luis Potosi was the only one which escaped the harsh anti-religion laws. Churches were grudgingly allowed open also in the state of Vera Cruz; this was a concession made by the military authorities after a popular demonstration engineered by the peasant population. The peasants rioted after soldiers shot a child who had been attending Mass (LR, 112-13).

Under the Mexican anti-religion laws, private houses could be searched for signs and symbols of the proscribed Roman Catholic faith; the penalty for possession of these articles was death or imprisonment. The state used education as a tool, to wrest the allegiance of the people from the Church: "Educational programmes everywhere were laid down by the Government on dusty rationalist lines -- nineteenth-century materialism reminiscent of Herbert Spencer and the Thinkers' Library . . ." (LR, 14).

Greene hated Mexico, with its heat and its violence. Of the anti-religious persecution, he writes: "It's typical of Mexico, of the whole human race perhaps -- violence in favour of an ideal and then the ideal lost and the violence just going on" (LR, 48). He was, however, heartened by signs that the religious instinct was not extinct, despite the persecutions and the deaths. He witnessed the Ash-Wednesday devotions in the Cathedral at Monterrey; he saw the peasants at Mass in San Luis Potosi -- "you realise suddenly that perhaps this is the population of heaven -- these aged, painful and ignorant faces: they are human goodness" (LR, 44). Despite the fact that between November 11, 1931 and April 28, 1936, four hundred and



eight Catholic institutions had been closed or converted to secular uses (LR, 73-74), there still remained in Las Casas five churches open of the twenty two left standing (LR, 219). And the fact that religion will out was attested by the "talking" statue of San Miguelito, a fraud designed by the unscrupulous to attract and defraud the pious. When religion is suppressed, says Greene, "it breaks its way through in strange and sometimes poisonous forms" (LR, 246), like the fake statue just mentioned, or the religion of the Indians -- "a dark, tormented, magic cult" (LR, 216). In the mountains of Chiapas, "that wild region of great crooked crosses, of the cave-dweller faces bowed before the crucified Christ, of the talking saint" (LR, 248), in this "mountainous strange world of Father Las Casas, Christianity went on its own frightening way" (LR, 216).

There were other signs of God's presence in the world: the people attending Mass and Benediction at Oaxaca; and above all, the heroic life and death of the Jesuit, Father Pro. Greene makes the point: "God didn't cease to exist when men lost their faith in Him; there were always catacombs where the secret rite could be kept alive till the bad times passed . . . He had eternity on His side" (LR, 38).

In his train journey from Oaxaca to Puebla, Greene summed up his experiences in Mexico, and philosophised on the Mexican people. He reached the conclusion that "Nobody can endure existence without a philosophy" (LR, 256). The government may have embarked on repression and cruelty in an effort to stamp out Christianity, but it had not succeeded: the faith lingered on in the mountains and even in the



capitals. In Greene's view, the Mexicans with their poverty and persecutions were better off than their wealthy American neighbours, as he makes the contrast between the two countries: "Here [Mexico] were idolatry and oppression, starvation and casual violence, but you lived under the shadow of religion -- of God or the Devil" (LR, 234).

Greene drew heavily on The Lawless Roads in writing The Power and The Glory, just as he later drew on his African Journals in writing A Burnt-Out Case and The Heart of The Matter. Correspondences, echoes and direct borrowings can be seen when one compares the novel with the travel book which influenced it. Greene's major character, the priest, is a composite portrait of three actual priests. The story of the martyred Father Pro is utilised by Greene, except that for artistic reasons his priest is the reverse of Father Pro in saintliness. Greene had also been told the story of the Chiapas whiskey priest by an acquaintance, Dr Robert Fitzpatrick: "He [Dr Fitzpatrick] had taken one of his sons to be baptised, but the priest was drunk and would insist on naming him Brigitta. He was a little lost, poor man . . .; but who can judge what terror and hardship and isolation may have excused him in the eyes of God?" (LR, 150). Greene was also amazed at the fortitude exhibited by yet another priest, the last surviving cleric in the state of Tabasco: "Every priest was hunted down and shot, except one who existed for ten years in the forests and the swamps, venturing out only at night; his few letters, I was told, recorded an awful sense of impotence -- to live in constant danger



and yet be able to do so little, it hardly seemed worth the horror"  
(LR, 129).

Mr Tench, the dentist in the novel, is modelled after Doc Winter, an American who practised at Frontera, and who was prevented from getting out of Mexico by the revolution and the accompanying devaluation of the peso. "Without a memory and without a hope in the immense heat, he loomed during those days as big as a symbol -- I am not sure of what, unless the aboriginal calamity, 'having no hope, and without God in the world'" (LR, 156).

The clerk in Yajalon, "a mestizo with curly sideburns and two yellow fangs at either end of his mouth" whom Greene "grew to loathe" (LR, 192), becomes with little change, the half-caste who betrays the priest in The Power and The Glory. Brigitte in the novel has her real-life counterpart in the two-year-old blonde girl mentioned in the travel book, "her tiny ears already drilled for rings and a gold bangle round the little bony wrist -- handcuffed to sophistication at birth -- like goodness dying out in the hot seaport" (LR, 119). The two schoolteachers in the travel book, the one who gave out anti-religious tracts (LR, 125-26), the other "very large and cheery and Socialist and optimistic" (LR, 195), are made over into the schoolteacher of the novel. The jefe of the novel was also drawn from life; he was the chief of police in the travel book, a "big, blond, cheery creature with curly hair, dressed too tightly in white drill, with a holster at his fat hip" (LR, 140). The Norwegian lady in the travel book, who taught her daughters -- "the small one was learning 'The



'Charge of the Light Brigade'; she got the lessons by post from America, and held periodic examinations in her little darkened parlour'" (LR, 190) -- parallels Mrs Fellows and her teaching methods with her daughter, Coral.

A careful examination of the novel shows that it deals with the role and function of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Secondly, like the medieval morality play Everyman, it asks and answers the question: how can an unvirtuous individual be restored to grace. Thirdly, the novel shows that the road toward salvation can be hard and difficult. Fourthly, it shows that the sacraments are necessary for salvation, and thus bears out the teaching of the Roman Church on the subject, as enunciated by the decrees of the Council of Trent: "Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novae legis non esse ad salutem necessaria, sed superflua, et sine eis aut eorum voto per solam fidem homines a Deo gratiam iustificationis adipisci, licet omnia singulis necessaria non sint, anathema sit."<sup>1</sup> Fifthly, the novel shows, in Cardinal Newman's words (which Greene uses as an epigraph to The Lawless Roads), "tokens, so faint and broken, of a superintending design" -- that is, that God still exists, even in Mexico, the region of the "huge abandonment." Finally, the novel stresses the fact that unworthy ministers are nevertheless channels used by God to bring the sacraments to the people, and that the validity of the sacraments does not depend on the personal character of the priest.

The role of the priesthood is aptly summed up for us by St Thomas Aquinas. St Thomas teaches that the priest is the mediator



between God and man: "As to the priests of the New Law, they may be called mediators of God and men, inasmuch as they are the ministers of the true Mediator by administering, in His stead, the saving sacraments to men."<sup>2</sup> The priest is also the representative of the people; he offers to God, on their behalf, prayers and supplications; and representing God, he brings to the people pardon for their sin. As the Angelic Doctor teaches, ". . . the priest is the appointed intermediary between God and the people; hence as it belongs to him to offer the peoples' gifts to God, so it belongs to him to offer consecrated gifts to the people."<sup>3</sup>

The Roman Catholic priest is therefore vitally necessary in a system that stresses the sacraments. Priests may be morally good or morally bad, but this does not interfere with the validity and efficacy of the sacraments; for, as Aquinas puts it, "holiness of life is requisite for Orders, as a matter of precept, but not as essential to the sacrament."<sup>4</sup> However, a priest's life should obviously be as far as possible, an imitatio Christi, as he follows in the footsteps of Christ, the great and eternal High priest.

The thesis of Greene's novel, briefly stated, is the conflict between materialism and religion; or, in other words, the confrontation of the Church with the naked force of a totalitarian state. On the specific level, it is the conflict between the lieutenant, symbolising lack of faith, and the priest, representing the faith of the Roman Church. The thesis is that the Church will survive, even if, as in the early days of Christianity, it is forced to go underground into



the catacombs. Greene similarly employs the theme of materialism versus religion in two of his plays, The Potting Shed and The Living Room.

The novel has the air of a parable: neither the priest, nor the lieutenant, nor the country are ever identified by name. This gives an air of timelessness or universality to the theme. There is allegory also: on the surface, the novel is about a government officer in pursuit of a priest (Greene continually uses the metaphor of "the hunted man" to symbolize the human condition); but on a deeper level, the novel takes on greater significance by showing also the pursuit of a sinful man by his God. The element of the thriller, as the priest is dramatically chased from state to state, is also raised to a spiritual level: the lieutenant harries the priest into the hands of God. Thus the title of the American edition of the book, The Labyrinthine Ways, is significant, since it is taken from Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven," a poem depicting the flight of the soul from God, and at last finding refuge in Him:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
 Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears      5  
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Both Thompson's and Greene's source for this image of God as the pursuer of the human soul is of course St Augustine, when he writes in his Confessions: "With a hidden goad thou didst urge me, that I might be restless until such time as the sight of my mind might discern thee for certain."<sup>6</sup>



There are some obvious similarities between Greene's novel and Thompson's poem: the theme of both is the pursuing grace of God; the protagonist of the poem flees from God and escapes into opium, while the priest flees God through pride and escapes into drink. Thompson in the poem sees himself as an alien in the universe, the priest in the novel is literally an outcast or outlaw. Thompson comes to a mature acceptance of suffering, and so does the priest; and finally, both heed the cry --

Rise, clasp my hand, and come -- .

Thompson's poem opens with the abandonment of God by the human soul. At the outset of Greene's novel, it is shown that men also have abandoned God, and He in turn, seems to have abandoned man to his own devices. God is implicitly present, but as a deus absconditus, who, although existent, has withdrawn from the world of his creation. Greene's view of the world since the Fall is given intense dramatic representation by his depiction of this "abandoned" state. He uses the imagery of infection: teeth are either rotten or tartar-covered; mention is made of the "blazing sun" and the "bleaching dust"; of vultures, sharks and carrion; of the "sour smell" from the river, and the cloudless sky. We are presented at the outset with Mr Tench, himself a symbol of the "huge abandonment" which lurks over the region. He has an "awful feeling of nausea" and a "look of vacancy." He has no religious values, dismissing religious belief by claiming, "I don't believe in anything like that . . . It's too hot anyway" (6). His enervation and inanation are the result of the life



lived away from God. Pain and distress are associated with his profession; an air of futility hangs over him -- he is a trapped man, isolated from his native land and from his family, with nothing to hope for and nobody to trust but himself. His lack of religious orientation is shown by the stained glass Madonna in his office, obtained from a sacked church; Tench merely thinks that it adds tone to his office.

In "this obscure neglected state" the Indian children, swollen with worms, have nothing to eat but dirt. A Catholic father tells his children: "We have been abandoned here. We must get along as best we can. As for the Church -- the Church is Padre José and the whiskey priest -- I don't know of any other. If we don't like the Church, well, we must leave it" (30). This is a realistic enough attitude; but Padre José and the whiskey priest are visible signs that God has not entirely abandoned his people.

There are other abandoners of God besides Tench. There are, for instance, the lieutenant and the chief of police. The lieutenant is described as an inverted mystic:

It infuriated him to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy -- a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew. (25)

Through asceticism, mortification, piety, prayer and meditation, the mystic aspires to eventual union with God. The Lieutenant possesses the first two requisites, since he is an ascetic who has succeeded in



mortifying the senses: "There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk -- a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again" (25). His room at the police barracks is bare and uncomfortable, reminiscent of a monastic cell. Like the others in this abandoned state, he has fled God by denying Him and pinning his faith in materialism. Thus it is doubtful if the Lieutenant will ever reach the final stage in the mystic's ladder to perfection, since piety, prayer and meditation are lacking.

Padre José is an ambivalent figure. By his very presence, he indicates that he is a servant of God, yet at the same time he has betrayed that God. He betrayed God by capitulating to the antireligious state; and the Lieutenant sees him as a living witness to the weakness of the faith. Married and in receipt of a government pension, he has lost the respect of his former parishioners. His ex-parishioners, however, realize that he had received the indelible mark of the priesthood at his ordination, and that the priesthood is not easily renounced. They ask him to say a prayer for the soul of a dead child: "An enormous temptation came to Padre José to take the risk and say a prayer over the grave: he felt the wild attraction of doing one's duty and stretched a sign of the cross in the air; then fear came back, like a drug" (58).

The whiskey priest, too, betrayed God. "The good things of life had come to him too early -- the respect of his contemporaries, a safe livelihood" (21). He was filled with pride, he was greedy for power and authority. He lacked humility and had more than his fair



share of ambition -- "he saw no reason why one day he might not find himself in the state capital, attached to the cathedral, leaving another man to pay off his debts in Conception" (118). He had stayed in the state after all the other priests had left, out of pride. Finally, he had betrayed his God by failing to live a holy life, one of the obligations laid upon clerics. Priests must be living examples to their flocks; but exterior acts of holiness without an interior, virtuous disposition had made him a hypocrite. He had offended God and broken the law of his church, which emphatically states that "Clerics must live both interiorly and exteriorly a holier life than lay people, and must excel them in giving the example of virtue and good deeds" (Canon 124).<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the novel's structure, Part 1 introduces us to the priest and to the other characters with whom he comes into contact. In terms of the symbolic meaning, using Thompson's poem as a convenient referent, we see the fleeing of his soul from God. This flight motif is exemplified by the priest, by Mr Tench, by the Lieutenant, and by Padre Jose. The priest flees from Christ by his sins, and by his failure to live his life in imitation of Christ. Mr Tench turns away from God because of apathy and despair. The Lieutenant denies God and seeks refuge in materialism, pinning his hope on a soul-destroying creed. Padre Jose denies his God by accepting an order of things which is openly contemptuous of, and seeks to destroy, life lived according to the dictates of religion. It is a total picture of man estranged from his creator. Coral Fellows, too, the child who



befriends the priest at the banana plantation, shares in the general spiritual abandonment. The priest asks her to pray for him, but she replies

"I don't believe in that."

"Not in praying?"

"You see, I don't believe in God. I lost my faith when I was ten." (48)

Both the priest and the father with the realistic outlook, mentioned earlier, attest to the fact that when the church had not been proscribed things had been different. There was happiness, says the priest; and the father says there had been "music, lights, a place where you could sit out of this heat -- and for your mother, well, there was always something for her to do. If we had a theatre, anything at all instead, we shouldn't feel so -- left" (61).

We see also varying attitudes to the Roman Catholic faith, that faith which, as Graham Greene is at pains to show in the novel, is resurgent in spite of all persecution. The Lieutenant is actively hostile; Mr Tench, apathetic or indifferent; Padre José, fearful; the whiskey priest, however, goes on ministering to the people, although hindered by his sins and in great danger. At the beginning of the novel, when the child comes with the request from its dying mother, the priest grumbles at the imposition; but knowing that his duty is to serve, he follows the child back into the interior and thus misses the boat which would have taken him to safety.

On the surface level, the structure of the novel in Part 2 deals with the priest's return to his village, and his meeting with



his illegitimate daughter Brigitta, and her mother Maria. He is pursued, but escapes from the Lieutenant. In the town, however, he is arrested for contravening the prohibition laws, is imprisoned, and later set free. On the metaphysical level, the priest is still pursued by God's grace. "Across the margent of the world I fled," is the gist of the second stanza of Thompson's poem; and Greene's priest pursues his wandering, on his journey from sin to holiness; meeting on the way and overcoming the phantasms of doubt, hopelessness and despair. But he carries on:

He was a bad priest, he knew it: they had a word for his kind -- a whisky priest, but every failure dropped out of sight and mind: somewhere they accumulated in secret -- the rubble of his failures. One day they would choke up, he supposed, altogether the source of grace. Until then he carried on, with spells of fear, weariness, with a shamefaced lightness of heart. (74)

In this second section of the novel occurs the first of the three meetings between the priest and the Lieutenant. The priest says mass for the villagers, and preaches to them. He is already back on the Godward path: his life parallels here the life of Christ, since Christ too, preached to the assembled multitudes. And just as Christ preached renunciation and poverty, so too does the priest, as he stresses that a glad acceptance of suffering for Christ's sake can lead to salvation: "Pray that you will suffer more and more. Never get tired of suffering. The police watching you, the soldiers gathering taxes, the beating you always get from the jefe because you are too poor to pay, smallpox and fever, hunger . . . that is all part of heaven -- the preparation. Perhaps without them, who can tell, you wouldn't enjoy heaven so much" (86).



He meets his daughter Brigitta, the fruit of his lust, conceived with Maria in a moment of weakness, despair and drunkenness. Thompson in his poem turns in hope to the innocence of little children. But Greene's Brigitta is far from innocent; she is "bad through and through" (100). She contrasts with Coral, the other girl in the novel, who is morally good. She is like Coral in that both reject religion; Maria tells the priest that Brigitta knows her catechism but will not say it -- "The world was in her heart already, like the small spot of decay in a fruit" (102). It is for this reason, to save his child, that the priest makes the damnation bargain employed by Greene already in Brighton Rock. "He prayed silently, 'O God, give me any kind of death -- without contrition, in a state of sin -- only save this child'" (103).

The similarities between the priest and the Lieutenant, already hinted at (the Lieutenant, attached to his men, "might have been chained to them unwillingly" (19); and the priest "was like the King of a West African tribe, the slave of his people, who may not even lie down in case the winds should fail" (18),) are even more apparent when the reactions of both men to Brigitta are considered. The lieutenant thinks that she is worth more than the Pope in Rome (93); the priest thinks she is "more important than a whole continent" (103). Greene stresses that the Lieutenant's ideas are good, but that he is pursuing them in the wrong way.

The priest is saved from the Lieutenant's vengeance by Brigitta, who tells him that the priest is her father. The priest is thus



saved by the outcome of his sin; and the lieutenant, despite his denials, would seem to be still unconsciously religiously oriented, since he is sure that a man with a child could not possibly be a priest. The vow of clerical celibacy obviously means more to him, then, than it does to the priest, who should have been chaste. This is but another example of the irony operating in the novel, shown at the very outset when the priest's breviary is concealed under a luridly erotic cover.

Greene has been criticised for the use of the damnation bargain, on the grounds that it is meaningless. Waugh could not conceive of a God conniving at such a pact; and on the other hand, it is doubtful if any human being, sinful as he is, is in any spiritual condition to make this bargain. Furthermore, it is each individual's duty to seek out his salvation first and foremost. But as in Brighton Rock, Greene by this motif is showing to what lengths an individual will go to aid another person. One naturally wonders if the bargain is kept. The priest's half of it is certainly kept, when in the final sections of the novel he is executed, under the terms he himself set out: in a state of sin, and without being confessed. It is probably to be presumed, therefore, that the other half of the bargain is carried out, and that Brigitte will be saved. It may be objected, however, that Greene is overusing the sacrifice of damnation in his novels. As a device, it is overly dramatic. Theologian Jean Mouroux, while seeing the offer of damnation as "the pure and magnificent cry which runs through Christian literature from one end to the other, from



Moses and St Paul down to St Margaret Mary and St Theresa of the Child Jesus,"<sup>8</sup> nevertheless points out that the offer is an impossible thing. "It . . . is an impossibility; the very idea . . . is conceptual, not real; and the soul knows it as soon as it begins to reflect. But then, precisely at the moment when it formulates this 'hypothesis of an impossible thing,' there is no question of reflection on its part, but only of love and service and sacrifice."<sup>9</sup> While Greene by the device means to show the faith of the individual, it could also be argued that it shows a weakness of faith, or imperfect faith, in the individual making the offer, since in a subtle way it offends against the orthodox conception of God, who is being made out to be a partner in an unseemly act. However, the device serves two purposes: it shows human love being pushed to its utmost limits, and it implies the existence of a God with whom one can negotiate.

It is after the priest leaves his village, setting out again on his wanderings, that he falls in with the mestizo, who, in this "book of symbolic identifications,"<sup>10</sup> is the Judas betrayer who eventually delivers him into the hands of the police. The priest at first manages to elude the mestizo, but in an effort to buy wine to celebrate mass, he is found with liquor on him by the local Red Shirts, and is jailed for contravention of the prohibition laws. The jail scene is important to the structure of the novel. Kohn sees the novel as divided into three stages, comparable to Dante's Divine Comedy, the stages thus being pre-purgatorial, purgatorial, and post-purgatorial. The jail scene, at the novel's centre, fits the second stage, the purgatorial.



The prison may also be seen as the world in miniature. We have already noted how Greene describes the world by images of constriction, just as he uses the image of the battlefield to describe the human struggle. In the prison the priest now sees a cross-section of sinful humanity, and ironically, the priest shares in the sins of all the others. There are the two lovers, who exemplify the sin of lust, as they snatch briefly at pleasure in the cramped and filthy cell; this is analogous to the priest's own sin of lust, as he broke his vow of celibacy and sinned with Maria. There is also the complacently pious "good woman" who has been imprisoned for having holy books in her possession: she mirrors in her complacency the priest in his early career, when exterior marks of holiness rather than an interior sanctity was the mark of his priesthood. The avarice indicated by the man who asks him for money has its equivalent in the sums demanded by the priest for the performance of his clerical duties. The allegory again continues: "This place was very like the world: overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love: it stank to heaven; but he realized that after all it was possible to find peace there, when you knew for certain that the time was short" (161).

The sufferings of the priest in the prison can be compared with Christ's sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane;<sup>12</sup> and through his suffering the priest grows in holiness and charity towards his fellow man, reproving also the "good" woman as she displays her soured virtues.



The priest's second meeting with the Lieutenant takes place, and again the policeman fails to recognize that he is in the presence of his antithesis, the exponent of the religion of atheism meeting with the priest of Christ. Greene does not make too much of this second meeting, but the Lieutenant's inherent goodness comes to the fore as he gives the priest a five-peso piece, and dismisses him with a warning. The lieutenant, then, has no objection to the priest as a man, but dedicates himself to eradicating all that the priest stands for.

The priest now tries to escape: he has made a bargain with God. If he is unrecognised, he will take it as a sign that he must avoid capture. The priest now lives up to his second bargain, and retraces his way to the banana plantation where Coral Fellows had earlier given him shelter.

Prowling through the deserted plantation, he comes across an anthology of poetry used by Coral. His eyes light on extracts from a Tennyson poem, "The Brook." The "triteness and untruth" of some of the lines shock him -- presumably this is the line "But I go on for ever," which the priest finds untrue. But this line would be ironically significant, if one related it to the general theme of Greene's novel: the continuance of the faith and the priesthood despite the terrors of persecution.

It is also at the banana plantation that the priest comes across an Indian woman, whose child has been shot by an escaped American gangster. The woman leads the priest to the Indian burial



ground, where the priest sees Christian symbols -- "an odd grove of crosses stood up blackly against the sky" (200). They were "the first Christian symbols he had seen for more than five years publicly exposed" (200). It was the result of a distorted Christianity, a faith that had gone underground. "It was the work of Indians and had nothing in common with the tidy vestments of the Mass and the elaborately worked out symbols of the liturgy. It was like a short cut to the dark and magical heart of the faith -- to the night when the graves opened and the dead walked" (200-01). The woman waits for a miracle -- the resurrection of her dead son -- and when nothing happens, "it was as if God had missed an opportunity" (201). The rains come, and the priest stumbles over the mountains, and by accident arrives at the finca of the Lehrs.

There follows an idyllic interlude at the ranch of the Lehrs, a German brother and sister with a Lutheran distaste for what they consider to be the errors and excesses of the Roman Church. During his stay, the priest slides back into corruption; he drinks and sells the sacraments, haggling over the fee to be paid for baptising children. (In The Lawless Roads, Fru R., the Norwegian lady, told Greene of a priest coming to Yajalon and baptising "several hundred children . . . at two pesos a head." One woman was turned away because she was fifty centavos short).<sup>13</sup> On the credit side, the priest hears confessions, and says Masses; but as he goes through the priestly routine, "he could feel the old life hardening around him like a habit, a stony case which held his head high and dictated the



way he walked, and even formed his words" (216).

But it is also to be noted that he is co-operating with grace. He has been prepared for this in the prison, and now he determines to push on to Las Casas, to confess his sins there and be absolved. The mestizo now appears back on the scene, bringing a message from the dying American gangster, who has been shot by the police. In going to the aid of Calver, the priest is on the way to his own Calvary. The note from the gangster is written on the back of a page from an essay written by Coral Fellows, which deals with the indecision of the Danish prince Hamlet. It is here significant that the priest does not hesitate, or stop to consider the consequences, as a Hamlet might have done; but quickly makes up his mind to go to the aid of the gangster because his mission is to help those who demand his services. A man wants to confess, and he is the only priest in the area; he must therefore go. Not to go would brand him as an unfaithful priest who will not carry out the duties required of the sacerdotal character. The priest knows that he is being betrayed, but "the oddest thing of all was that he felt quite cheerful; he had never really believed in this peace" (233). The priest is like Christ as he willingly accepts the trap and walks into it. Like Christ, who was betrayed by Judas for thirty pieces of silver, the priest is betrayed by the mestizo for a reward of seven hundred pesos.

But the act is useless, for the gangster does not confess after all, instead urging the priest to take his gun and fight his way out of the trap. The priest exercises his ministry and gives the



dead man conditional absolution. Karl Patten identifies Calver as the impenitent thief who railed at Christ as he hung upon the cross.<sup>14</sup> This surely is a misinterpretation, and Calver should rather be identified with the penitent thief, who won heaven, since Calver at the point of dying, unselfishly refuses to save himself, but offers help to the priest. Greene again leaves him to God's mercy; it is impossible to assert that the man is damned, even though he does have so many crimes on his soul: that final act of charity to the priest may have meant the difference between salvation and damnation.

The priest is captured by the Lieutenant, and is led off to the jail and the execution which awaits him. In the conversations which follow between the priest and the Lieutenant, the Lieutenant subtly changes as he and the priest come to know each other better. The Lieutenant catalogues the wrongdoings of the Church, and comments adversely on the Church's teaching about suffering. The Lieutenant wants to alleviate human pain and misery; the priest retorts that this is impossible, and that any Utopian scheme based on the supposed goodness of human nature is doomed to fail, because "there won't be always good men in your party" (252). The priest argues also that it is better for the poor to suffer on earth, because their reward will be the greater in heaven. The argument is obviously no more than a device to convey opposing points of view; and the priest never really answers the Lieutenant's arguments but employs the clichés of religion instead of disproving the policeman's contentions.



The Lieutenant argues that the priest's God is obviously not a God of love, otherwise He would hardly have allowed his faithful servant to meet such an end. The priest humbly retorts that he is not worthy: "I do know this -- that if there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too . . . I wouldn't want it to be any different" (259). The Lieutenant then does an act of charity, breaking his own rules in the process: he tries to get Padre José to confess the priest, but José fears a trap and refuses.

The drama comes to its appointed end; the priest is shot. His martyrdom is foreshadowed early in the novel, when Mr Tench views the priest: "The man's dark suit and sloping shoulders reminded Mr Tench uncomfortably of a coffin, and death was in his carious mouth already" (11-12).

The priest, as a representative of God, dies for his faith. Again, this parallels the Christ story. At the moment of death, the mind of the priest is exercised with thoughts of sanctity; Tarrou, in Camus' Plague, was also interested in the question of sanctity, and wonders if it is possible in a world without God. Greene's priest feels

an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him, at that moment, that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted -- to be a saint. (273)

The priest's dying words are not the triumphant "Viva el Cristo Rey!" of Juan, the plaster saint in the sentimental hagiography which



the Mexican mother reads to her children; it is instead a mumbled and apologetic "Excuse." This is susceptible to two interpretations: it can either be an expression of contrition, or it could be analogous to Christ's "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23, 34). There is an element of ambiguity. However, either interpretation, or both, is possible. It shows the humility of the priest in the face of death. His last thoughts are thoughts of holiness and contrition. His will is being perfected as his soul is about to meet its maker. He does not rail against his betrayer, as a lesser man might have done; instead he feels sorry for him: "It was really shocking bad luck for the poor devil that he was to be burdened with a sin of such magnitude" (238). He realizes also that there may have been extenuating circumstances which excused his betrayer's act; his poverty may have had a great part to play in the betrayal -- the money he earned would enable him to live in comfort for quite some time.

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, one theme of The Power and The Glory is the role of the priest in the world. Greene agrees with Aquinas that the priesthood confers an indelible mark upon the recipient. In a dialogue with Coral, the girl urges that the solution to the priest's dilemma is to give up his faith:

She said, "Of course you could -- renounce."

"I don't understand."

"Renounce your faith," she explained, using the words of her European History.

He said, "It's impossible. There's no way. I'm a priest. It's out of my power."

The child listened intently. She said, "Like a birthmark."



It is therefore necessary to assess the character of Greene's priest, and to compare him with the ideal Catholic priest, to see how closely he sticks to, or deviates from the ideal. What type of a man is the priest? As Robert du Parc queries, "Quel personnage est-il? Un robot, mene par la fatalité, ou un homme libre? Un predestiné à la damnation, conscient d'avancer à grands pas vers l'enfer, ou une manière de saint qui s'ignore?"<sup>15</sup> The priest was certainly no robot. He had complete freedom about staying in the state or escaping. He debated the problem with himself:

If he left them, they would be safe, and they would be free from his example. [But if he went] it would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist. Wasn't it his duty to stay, even if they despised him, even if they were murdered for his sake? even if they were corrupted by his example? He was shaken with the enormity of the problem . . . (80)

It is obvious, then, that the priest had a choice: to go or to stay. There was a third alternative -- to conform, as Padre Jose had done. The whisky priest exercised his freedom of the will, and stayed, even though he made the decision for the wrong reason, out of pride.

Greene's priest is obviously not a shining example to anyone; indeed, in this novel Greene "challenges the conventional ideas of sanctity and of the priesthood."<sup>16</sup> In the novel it is pointed out that disparities can and do exist between the man and the office, and that it is a fallacy to confuse the two. Greene's priest sins grievously, and compared to the real-life Curé d'Ars or to Bernanos' fictional country priest, or even Mauriac's Abbé Callou, the whisky priest offends seriously. However, Greene shows that there are



extenuating circumstances which must be taken into account when cataloguing the priest's sinful acts. The good priest, as enjoined by Canon Law, should engage in frequent exercises of piety: frequent confession, meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, daily communion, celebration of Mass on Sundays and days of obligation, attendance at retreats (Canon 125).<sup>17</sup> But Greene's priest cannot confess, because there are no other priests in the state, except for Padre José, who refuses to hear his confession. On the run, he has scarce time for meditation or examination of conscience; and saying Mass regularly on days of obligation too was impossible -- . . . the years behind him were littered with surrenders -- feast days and fast days and days of abstinence had been the first to go: then he had ceased to trouble more than occasionally about his breviary -- and finally he had left it behind altogether at the port in one of his periodic attempts at escape. Then the altar stone went -- too dangerous to carry with him. He had no business to say Mass without it: he was probably liable to suspension, but penalties of the ecclesiastical kind began to seem unreal in a state where the only penalty was the civil one of death. (73)

Priests are enjoined to recite the breviary daily (Canon 135),<sup>18</sup> but as he had left his at Mr Tench's, this injunction could hardly have been carried out. A becoming and seemly clerical dress is also to be worn (Canon 136):<sup>19</sup> but had he done this, he would immediately have given himself away and invited disaster. Continued theological studies are urged (Canon 129);<sup>20</sup> this was another obvious impossibility, with the seminaries shut down and priests liable to be shot at sight. Canon 132 enjoins that priests should keep the vow of chastity: the whisky priest broke this rule in a moment of weakness and despair.<sup>21</sup>



As pointed out earlier, the sinfulness of the priest does not affect the validity of the sacraments. Aquinas would agree that the priest exercises his ministry in sin; to the question, "Whether wicked men sin in administering the sacraments?" Aquinas replies:

. . . it is fitting for the ministers of the sacraments to be righteous; because ministers should be like unto their Lord . . . Consequently, there can be no doubt that the wicked sin by exercising the ministry of God and the Church, by conferring the sacraments. And since this sin pertains to irreverence towards God and the contamination of holy things, as far as the man who sins is concerned, although holy things in themselves cannot be contaminated; it follows that such a sin is mortal in its genus.<sup>22</sup>

But to the question, whether the sacraments can be conferred by evil ministers, Aquinas rejoins that ". . . the ministers of the church can confer the sacraments, though they be wicked"<sup>23</sup> since priests are merely the instruments employed by Christ.

The impact of God's grace upon man is another theme which is central to The Power and The Glory; Mauriac says the novel shows "the utilisation of sin by grace."<sup>24</sup> Both Francis Thompson in his poem and Greene in his novel show human beings co-operating with divine grace. Greene's problem was to make this credible, since, as Mauriac points out also, "Nothing is more elusive in real life than the finger of God."

Kunkel says Greene plays favourites, and showers grace on his Catholic characters, "but is stingy where certain non-Catholic characters are concerned."<sup>25</sup> Kunkel cites the Lieutenant as a character denied grace by Greene.



The Lieutenant is cut off from grace, because, warring with God, he hates Christianity; . . . Conflict in Greene's two-world view is generated by the antagonism which always exists between characters who are given no access to God's grace and those who are. But this central contrast . . . has heretical implications: for the orthodox Catholic all virtues spring from grace . . . the Lieutenant's compassion [is] no exception. To believe, as Greene obviously does, that some characters are forever outside the pale of grace and so incapable of religious belief and experience is to cast a gratuitous slur on God's mercy and to flirt with Jansenism.

Now there seems to be a confusion in Kunkel's argument. First of all, he categorically states that the Lieutenant is denied grace by Greene, and then, by his own showing, proves that the policeman has been given enough grace (internal grace) to allow him to practise the virtue of compassion. One cannot have it both ways, and Kunkel's criticism calls for a discussion of grace, and the alleged Jansenism of The Power and The Glory. Grace, in theological terminology, is a free gift (gratia) of God. It cannot be merited by one's own efforts, but it is the completely gratuitous gift of God. All men have it, but in varying degrees. Those who deny or reject God cannot expect as much grace from God, as those who have a right will; hence such people will fall even deeper into sin.<sup>26</sup> This is the position of the Lieutenant who, by adopting atheism, is rejecting God's grace. On the other hand, impulses towards good, and all good acts, derive ultimately from God. The Lieutenant obviously does have some good points: love for children, love for suffering humanity, a desire to improve the human condition, and his asceticism. He lacks the theological virtues, faith and hope, but has natural virtues, which are God-given.



Like Kunkel, Gustav Herling maintains that Greene's "biased, deeply pessimistic view of human affairs shows a leaning towards Jansenism."<sup>27</sup> Now the Jansenist heresy holds that after Adam's fall human nature became intrinsically and radically evil. This would therefore mean that "every human act is of itself and in itself evil. It makes man to be a sink of moral corruption by nature. Natural virtue becomes impossible, and unregenerate man can do nothing of himself but sin." This doctrine is "a blasphemy against God's goodness."<sup>28</sup> Greene does not show all human acts as being intrinsically evil, and it is obvious, as earlier stated, that the Lieutenant does possess virtues; these virtues are however, misdirected, since his goal is a wrong one.

Hesla has doubts about the death of the whiskey priest. He calls it "suicidal, though . . . ambiguously so . . . the priest voluntarily turns back from certain safety to return to equally certain capture and execution; and even when warned by the dying Yankee murderer, he makes no attempt to defend himself."<sup>29</sup> Hesla calls this "self-slaughter." But there seems to me to be a confusion of terms here. To know that one will certainly be killed if one does a certain act, does not mean that one is responsible for killing oneself -- unless the term suicide is used very loosely. This is the trap that Major Scobie in The Heart of The Matter, falls into when he assumes that the death of Christ on the Cross was suicide. The priest's death must be discussed, not in terms of suicide, but martyrdom. Martyrdom means accepting death for Christ's sake. "Martyrdom



consists essentially in standing firmly to truth and justice against the assaults of persecution. Hence it is obvious that martyrdom is an act of virtue."<sup>30</sup>

Did the priest accomplish anything, in life or in death? In assessing his value to the people he serves, the priest denigrates his usefulness:

He thought: "If I hadn't been so useless, useless . . ." The eight hard hopeless years seemed to him to be only a caricature of service: a few communions, a few confessions, and an endless bad example. He thought: If I had only one soul to offer, so that I could say, Look what I've done . . . People had died for him, they had deserved a saint, and a tinge of bitterness spread across his mind for their sake that God hadn't thought fit to send them one. Padre Jose and me, he thought, Padre Jose and me, and he took a drink again from the brandy flask. He thought of the cold faces of the saints rejecting him. (270-71)

But he has achieved much more than he thinks he has. First, by his martyrdom, an upsurge of religious faith will ensue. Juan, the hero of the story which the pious mother reads to her children, was martyred and his relics were collected by the pious, deeply moved at his death, for veneration. It has always been held that the blood of the martyrs fecundates the church, and it is implied that this is what will happen because of the priest's death.

Secondly, the Lieutenant, now that he has captured the priest, feels "without a purpose, as if life had drained out of the world" (268). Victor de Pange draws the analogy between the Lieutenant and Saul, the persecutor of the early Christian church; and points out that the Lieutenant, like Saul, may well be on the road to Damascus, preparatory to being converted: "Le lieutenant n'est certainement pas



au nombre des damnés. En cherchant à nier Dieu il a appris à le mieux connaître. Peut-être, lui aussi, est-il sur un chemin de Damas?"<sup>31</sup>

The Lieutenant, in disliking what the priest represented, had some right on his side:

. . . he remembered the smell of incense in the churches of his boyhood, the candles and the laciness and the self-esteem, the immense demands made from the altar steps by men who didn't know the meaning of sacrifice. The old peasants knelt there before the holy images with their arms held out in the attitude of the cross: tired by the long day's labour in the plantations they squeezed out a further mortification. And the priest came round with the collecting bag taking their centavos, abusing them for their small comforting sins, and sacrificing nothing at all in return -- except a little sexual indulgence. (22-23)

Mr Lehr, a foreigner, had also voiced the complaint that priests lived in luxury, and that the churches were elaborately furnished, while the people starved. The implied suggestion is that a reformed church, purified of its abuses, and with honest and devout priests, would win back the strayed allegiance of the Lieutenant and others like him.

The priest is also shown as bringing children to Christ. Brigitta will probably be saved; and Coral, too, seems to have gained from her brief association with the priest. She was depicted as a precocious child, who had lost all faith; she disappears mysteriously from the novel, and later we have Captain Fellows mentioning to his wife, the priest's influence on their daughter: ". . . the odd thing is -- the way she went on afterwards -- as if he'd told her things" (278). In the priest's conversation with Coral, he had offered to pray for the recovery of her faith. These two things, taken in



conjunction with the dream the priest has in the prison, are significant. The priest "had a curious dream. He dreamed he was sitting at a cafe table in front of the high altar of the cathedral. About six dishes were spread before him, and he was eating hungrily" (271). This may be a possible reference to the six sacraments, with Coral officiating at the seventh: "Then the glass by his plate began to fill with wine, and looking up he saw the child from the banana station was serving him. She said, 'I got it from my father's room'" (272). We know that Coral is dead; and it is implied that her death may have been a baptism of blood, that is, martyrdom, and that she is now interceding for the priest. (Coral's death is obscure and problematic, but it can be postulated that she died at the hands of the Lieutenant's soldiers for her part in protecting the priest; and by martyrdom, as Aquinas teaches, all and any venial and mortal sins she may have committed were remitted, and plenary absolution gained, thus admitting her directly to heaven).<sup>32</sup>

The boy Luis, too, is shown as being under the spell of the priest's martyrdom. At the beginning of the novel, he was shown as having a romantic interest in what the Lieutenant stood for, and he had protested vigorously against the sickly sweet pieties of his mother. A change comes over him at the novel's end: another priest mysteriously arrives on the scene, and the boy receives him humbly and with reverence. Greene had complained in The Lawless Roads: "The children have no bank of sanctity to draw on . . . and we cannot tell what human nature may owe to that past fund of holiness. It is



not inconceivable that the worst evil possible to natural man may be found years hence in Mexico" (LR, 202). The novel shows that such a "bank of sanctity" may be coming into existence.

Mr Tench, too, experiences a sense of loss when the priest is executed -- "an appalling sense of loneliness came over Mr Tench . . . he felt deserted" (282). The novel, however, ends on a note of hope for Tench; he has made up his mind to leave Mexico and begin anew at home.

How does the whiskey priest compare with the other priests in the novel? He is better than Padre José, who, having lost the theological virtues, capitulated to the atheistic state. That the whiskey priest refused to take this step is a measure of his integrity to his ordination vows. The second priest mentioned in the novel is the martyr Juan, whose biography the pious mother reads to her children. Juan is a stained-glass figure who does the right things and says the right things, noble unto death. He makes a splendid showing for his church. His story ironically undercuts the real events taking place in Greene's novel, the flight and pursuit of the priest, and suggests that the reality of the situation is far different from the ideal situation of the pious Juan.

The priest who is welcomed on the last page of the novel by the little Luis is Greene's way of accentuating the point that the ministry of the Church will continue throughout the ages. Luis' dream of the bleeding fish is significant:



He dreamed that the priest whom they had shot that morning was back in the house dressed in the clothes his father had lent him and laid out stiffly for burial. The boy sat beside the bed and his mother read out of a very long book all about how the priest had acted in front of the bishop the part of Julius Caesar: there was a fish basket at her feet, and the fish were bleeding, wrapped in her handkerchief. He was bored and very tired and somebody was hammering nails into a coffin in the passage. Suddenly the dead priest winked at him -- an unmistakable flicker of the eyelid, just like that. (287)

It underscores the point of suffering through persecution -- the fish was the symbol used by the early Christians, scratched on the walls of the catacombs. The free acceptance of a faith means that its continuation is assured.

As the title of the novel indicates (Greene uses the Protestant version of the Lord's Prayer; the Roman Catholic version omits the doxology), human beings find true glory in serving God. The whiskey cleric has fulfilled his priestly vocation in leading others to God. The novel chronicles the triumph of the priest, as the Church and the faith prevail over the secular order.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF PITY: THE HEART

#### OF THE MATTER

The Heart of the Matter is a confused and confusing novel.

One reason for the confusion may well be that Greene "tried to write a true tragedy and succeeded in writing a suggestive melodrama, with tragic overtones and ironic implications."<sup>1</sup> The novel's story deals with the psychic disintegration of Major Henry Scobie, a British police officer in a sweltering, unnamed West African colony at the time of the second world war. The basic confusion is centred around Scobie: exactly what sort of a man is he? Some critics and reviewers have come to the conclusion that Scobie is a good man destroyed by external pressures and circumstances, whereas Greene meant the reader to see him as a man corrupted from within by a suspect emotion -- pity. Even penetrating critic-theologian Nathan Scott was misled into seeing Scobie as a Christ-like figure. Greene's irony, then, has been so subtle that his readers have missed it entirely.

The confusion lies squarely in Greene's treatment of Scobie. Greene uses Scobie throughout as the centre of consciousness (although on a few occasions we see events through the eyes of another character, Wilson); it might have helped if he had employed a third point of



view - he had apparently toyed with the idea of using Louise as a third point of view, but decided against it.<sup>2</sup> For by using Scobie as the main centre of consciousness for most of the book, Greene subtly elicits from the reader a great deal of sympathy for Scobie, which in fact Scobie does not deserve. Furthermore, another confusion lies in Greene's treatment of pity as a standard of conduct. For Greene assumes that pity is necessarily a bad emotion, whereas in fact it is an ambiguous emotion: to pity someone can mean that you feel compassion for him, or it can mean that you find him contemptible. The ambiguity is further seen if one ponders on the double-edged meanings of the words "pitiable" and "pitiful." The former means deserving of sympathy; the latter means compassionate, in the sense of "full of pity." Both words do carry the added meaning of contemptible.

While decrying Scobie's pity for others (in the sense that Scobie's pity is a limited emotion, elicited only by the sufferings of others), Greene obviously pities (in the sense of sympathising with) his own creation. The effect is, again, one of supersubtlety; and if the reader misses all these ironies and subtleties, he can hardly be taken to task for this.

Although the novel is set in Africa, Africa remains a mere backdrop and nothing more. There is very little of the feel of the country in the novel, except for the occasional reference to the odd pye-dog, the laterite roads, and the sunsets. Africa is merely the place where the events happen. Since the story is fixed firmly on



Scobie and his disintegrating personality, there is little exploitation of the tensions generated between the colonisers (the whites) and the colonised (the Africans) -- although one could say that this appears in a very muted form indeed in Harris's irrational hatred of the blacks. The Africans, when they are dealt with at all, are seen as houseboys or junior policemen, and are inferior in status. The whites are more closely inspected: there are the sailors who land periodically in the colony, and are borne off in triumph to the local brothel which sits beside the police-station (2); there is the police commissioner and his junior officers; Wilson, the government spy, who shares with the clerk Harris the unhappy memories of a minor public school; the colonial secretary, the sanitary inspector, the bank manager; and the chattering, gossipy, wives of the colonisers.

The structure of the novel is extraordinarily complex. There are fifty-five short scenes, arranged in three books. Each book is symmetrically divided into three parts. O'Donnell rightly comments that "such an organisation, more hierarchical than that of War and Peace or Remembrance of Things Past, seems altogether disproportionate in so short a work; it is as if the events described were taking place in some vast structure that had crumbled and caved in."<sup>3</sup>

The filmic quality seen in Brighton Rock is also present in this novel. The chapters, with their numerous sub-sections, are again analogous to the multiplicity of scenes which make up a film. Of this novel, Waugh declares: "It is as though, out of an infinite length of film, sequences had been cut. . . . The writer has become director and



producer."<sup>4</sup> On the opening pages of the novel, the camera tracks the crowds walking up Bond Street, picking out the African clerks, the schoolgirls, the officers from the convoy in the harbour; it then zooms in on "a squat grey-haired man walking alone" (4). This man later turns out to be Scobie, on whom the narrative is focussed. The camera eye then follows Scobie into his office, picking out "the table, two kitchen chairs, a cupboard, some rusty handcuffs hanging on a nail like an old hat, a filing cabinet" (6). The still-life effect gained from the enumerative catalogue is also present in the last quotation.

In The Heart of the Matter, Greene explores the implications behind the use of pity as a standard of conduct in human relationships. He excoriates this standard, since, as de Pange points out, "La pitié est ainsi une maladie de la sensibilité qui ne peut supporter la vue de la souffrance."<sup>5</sup> And it is because Major Scobie cannot stand to witness the sufferings of others that he attempts, like God, to take the responsibility for all human suffering upon himself. Now Greene has already shown us, in The Ministry of Fear, how pity is to be viewed. Arthur Rowe, the protagonist of that entertainment, is shown as a man whose relationships with his wife and with others are corroded by pity; because of pity, and because he cannot bear to see the sufferings of a sick wife, Rowe poisons her. The jury find it a mercy-killing, and he escapes the gallows. Rowe continues to wonder throughout his life, whether he killed his wife because she could not stand the pain, or because he could not stand



the pain she gave him. Another episode, this time in Rowe's childhood, shows his pity again in operation; unable to stand the sight of a wounded rat, he hysterically batters it to death to put it out of its misery.

Auden calls pity a vice, a "corrupt parody of love and compassion which is so insidious and deadly for sensitive natures. Behind pity for another lies self-pity, and behind self-pity lies cruelty. To feel compassion for someone is to make oneself their equal; to pity them is to regard oneself as their superior."<sup>6</sup> Auden further calls pity "a great and typical heresy of our time."<sup>7</sup>

An emotion which leads one to murder, however much altruistically, is obviously an emotion to be feared. Greene makes this point over and over again in The Ministry of Fear, by having Arthur Rowe reflect, "Pity is cruel. Pity destroys. Love isn't safe when pity's prowling around."<sup>8</sup> Authorially, in the same book, Greene comments on "the horrible and horrifying emotion of pity,"<sup>9</sup> and also on "the sense of pity which is so much more promiscuous than lust."<sup>10</sup>

It is obvious, then, that Greene makes a distinction between the virtue of love and pity - which he considers a vice. Out of love, his characters are willing to damn themselves for others; out of pity, his characters commit acts which are sinful (in theological terminology) or wrong (in terms of secular morality). One critic, misreading the novel -- an easy thing to do -- says that Greene equates pity with charity, and points out: "'Pity' is clearly not the same as charity, and, if it is not, the elaborate theological tour de force



cannot be sustained."<sup>11</sup> This comment is based on the mistaken assumption that Greene sees pity as analogous to love; whereas, on the contrary, Greene is saying the opposite. In the entertainment, The Ministry of Fear, the author declares that "Arthur Rowe was monstrous."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, The Heart of the Matter shows Major Scobie as a character so monstrously perverted, that he is entirely lacking in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Scobie, like Conrad's Kurtz, is "rotten to the core." As Greene himself says of Scobie: "Scobie est en effet à mes yeux une victime de la pitié. En écrivant The Heart of The Matter, j'ai voulu montrer . . . que la pitié était une force corrompue."<sup>13</sup>

Major Scobie is a British colonial official in the West African colony of Sierra Leone. He is married to a vapid and complaining wife who has pretensions to culture, her aspirations gaining for her the unkind nickname of "Literary Louise" bestowed by the uncharitable whites in the colony. Love between Scobie and his wife is a thing of the past, although he tries to maintain the fiction that he still cares for her. When the novel opens, he has been passed over for promotion to the Commissionership of Police. His wife sees this as a slight to her pride and dignity; and, unhappy, she decides to sail to South Africa for a holiday. Money is needed to finance the trip, and Scobie, whose salary is small, is obliged to borrow two hundred pounds from Yusef, a rascally Syrian trader. Yusef's deals are suspect, and he is being spied on by Wilson, a British agent sent out to check on, and smash, a diamond smuggling ring.



The events of the novel take place as the second world war rages. A shipwrecked boat, torpedoed by the Germans, brings the pathetic, nineteen-year-old, recently-widowed Helen Rolt to the colony. She and Scobie drift into a relationship. Scobie, out of pity for Helen's unattractiveness, is unfaithful to his wife. News of the affair reaches Louise in South Africa, and she returns home. Scobie is faced with an impossible situation, and must now give up one of the women in his life. Louise decides to test her husband by forcing him to attend Mass and take communion -- his failure to do so will prove to her that Scobie has not broken off the relationship with Helen; while partaking of the sacrament will prove that he has repented, and been absolved. Scobie satisfies his wife by taking communion, but he knows that he is damning himself by taking the sacrament unworthily. Forced to make a choice between Louise and Helen, and realizing that by his sins he is opening another wound in the body of Christ, Scobie decides that the only way to end his predicament is to commit suicide. This way, he thinks, he will stop giving hurt to Louise, Helen, and God.

Greene, in the novel, is exploring the tensions caused between the dictates of religion, on the one hand, and human desires, on the other. He also shows that pride can masquerade as compassion, under the guise of pity. The chief character is a Roman Catholic, and since the religious theme is at the centre of the novel, and since the context is a Roman Catholic one, the novel is meant to be interpreted in these terms. In terms of Catholic theology, then, Scobie died in



mortal sin, and the inescapable conclusion which the dogmatist will reach on reading the book is that Scobie is damned. Allott and Farris are against this type of criticism, and object to critics who too readily forget that they are dealing with a piece of fiction, not an actual case-history. If Scobie's fate is ambiguous, it is because the facts given in the novel admit of several interpretations. In life there would be hope of unearthing further facts already known. But in dealing with a character in a novel there can be no new facts to discover; and for this reason most of the exercises in casuistry are as irrelevant to a valuation of The Heart of The Matter as a Victorian essay on Hamlet's obesity to literary criticism of the play.<sup>14</sup>

But in terms of the Catholic moral theology by which the actions of the characters in the novel may be judged, it is interesting to speculate on the future of Major Scobie, who, like Pinkie Brown should be damned -- according to the rules. Even so, it can be argued that this is outside the scope of the novel; and, indeed, an objection to this is made in the novel, by Father Rank. A starting point for any criticism of the novel must obviously be a thorough analysis of the character of Scobie.

Nathan Scott sees Scobie as a man who attempts the Christlike way:

Here then, is Greene's exemplum of the Christian hero in a tragic situation: here is the branch that grows out of the "stony rubbish" of our world -- the man who, being caught up and possessed by the example of Christ's charity, discovers as Christ discovered in Gethsemane, that goodness involves suffering, but who does not refuse that suffering, so profound is his compassion for his fellow creatures, his compassion being nurtured by "the conditions of life." And the fact that his attempt to reenact our Lord's Passion proves unsuccessful leaves us not with the pity and terror of Greek tragedy but rather with something like the sense of judgment and forgiveness of the Gospels.<sup>15</sup>



O'Donnell also interprets Scobie's character along these lines, when he says: "In the theological sense, the sense of its intent, the story of Scobie is the record of an attempt to imitate Christ. Scobie's 'pity,' his assumption of responsibility for all suffering, is a simulacrum of the Passion."<sup>16</sup> Pryce-Jones sees Scobie as "a good [man] seduced by the weakness of the flesh."<sup>17</sup> Lodge sees the novel in terms of "the fall of a good man."<sup>18</sup> Henry Morton Robinson says Scobie is, "in his obscure station, an all-suffering alter Christus."<sup>19</sup> An anonymous Newsweek reviewer calls Scobie "one of those rare creatures in life or fiction, a truly good man."<sup>20</sup>

I have quoted extensively these assessments of Scobie because I think they are misleading and that these writers have all missed the point that Greene is making: but Greene himself is responsible for the confusion, as shown earlier. Scobie is in reality a morally bad man and a bad Catholic. The novel shows his continued decay as a man, as a police officer, and as a Christian. Let us first examine Scobie in his professional role, that of police officer. The Commissioner calls Scobie affectionately by the name given to him half in derision, half in jest, by the rest of the colony -- "Aristides the Just" (9). But Scobie does not deserve the title, since he does not do his duty as a police officer should, and therefore the alert reader sees undertones of irony in the title. A major symbol in the novel is the handcuffs hanging in Scobie's office. They are described as "some rusty handcuffs hanging on a nail like an old hat" (6). The presence of these innocuous objects is not simply by



chance, as part of the paraphernalia of a policeman's office. They are placed at strategic points in the narrative, and are symbolic of Scobie's role of police officer. The rust symbolises the moral erosion at work in Scobie. The handcuffs are mentioned again when Scobie writes up his report on the searching of the Portuguese ship in the harbour -- "he sat down in his own room under the handcuffs and began to write his report" (56). In this significant scene, the presence of the handcuffs alerts the reader to Scobie's failure to do his duty as a police officer.

The searching of the Portuguese ship by Scobie is a pivotal incident. Scobie searches the ship after he has received a tip-off that someone on the ship is engaged in smuggling diamonds. He investigates the captain's cabin, and finds concealed in the water closet a sealed letter. Out of sentiment, and because of the pleas of the fat, unattractive captain, Scobie opens the letter, reads it, decides that it is innocuous, and tears it up. His duty as a police officer was to have passed it on, unopened, to the cipher experts who would then have tested it to find out if it were innocent or not. Scobie believed the captain when the latter said that the epistle was to his daughter; now the letter may or may not have been innocent: what is important is that Scobie was arrogating to himself an authority he did not possess, by opening the letter and making the decision he made. Greene comments authorially that "Scobie against the strictest orders was exercising his own imperfect judgment" (57); and Scobie himself realizes that he has committed an infraction --



"his own heartbeats told him he was guilty -- that he had joined the ranks of the corrupt police officers . . . he had been corrupted by sentiment" (60).

In the episode with the Portuguese captain, Greene shows the deleterious effects of Scobie's pity; and the episode also serves to show the reader exactly what Scobie's pity consists of. The scene is set:

The man had lowered his bulk on to the edge of the bath as though it were a heavy sack his shoulders could no longer bear. He kept on wiping his eyes like a child -- an unattractive child, the fat boy of the school. Against the beautiful and the clever and the successful, one can wage a pitiless war, but not against the unattractive: then the millstone weighs on the breast (53).

Scobie's pity for the captain, then, implies a superior attitude; and it contains equal portions of smugness and complacency.

The second chink in the armour of Scobie as police officer can be seen in his dealings with Yusef. He borrows the two hundred pounds from the Syrian, but neglects to tell his superior about it, to allay any suspicions which might later arise, about the transaction. He regards the deal purely as a loan, to be repaid with interest, but the Syrian uses this as a "hold" over Scobie. Later, on advice from Yusef, Scobie catches Yusef's rival, Tallit, in a diamond-smuggling bid. The diamonds turn out to have been "planted" by Yusef -- but in all fairness to Scobie, though, he had not known of this. Yusef uses another "hold" on Scobie to force him to smuggle diamonds for him, and ironically the diamonds are to be handed over to the same captain Scobie had earlier pitied. In this second meeting with the Portuguese



captain, the positions are reversed; Scobie in looking into a mirror, sees an unfamiliar face: "Momentarily he wondered: who can that be? before he realized that it was only this new unfamiliar look of pity that made it strange to him. He thought: Am I really one of those whom people pity?" (244).

Scobie, implicated with Yusef, has rapidly lost his integrity. When Yusef says, "We must stay friends always" (178), we see the further descent of Scobie, as he is now linked with a smuggler and dishonest businessman. And Scobie wonders, "Shall I really be so desperate?" when Yusef ingratiatingly says, "One day you will want my friendship. And I shall welcome you" (179). But Scobie does need Yusef -- in his affair with Helen Rolt, he incautiously writes her a love letter and signs it. The letter finds its way into Yusef's hands, and Yusef again has Scobie in his power. When Scobie later grows distrustful of his native servant, Ali, who he suspects is spying on him, Yusef is the only person he can go to for help, and Yusef settles everything by having Ali murdered. Confronted with the dead Ali, Scobie "swore aloud, hysterically. 'By God, I'll get the man who did this,' but under the anonymous stare insincerity withered. He thought: Didn't I know all the time in Yusef's room that something was planned? Couldn't I have pressed for an answer? . . . Scobie thought: if only I could weep, if only I could feel pain; have I really become so evil?" (301-02).

Scobie's relationships with others are dictated by what he terms his sense of responsibility. But his sense of responsibility,



when scrutinised, turns out to be no more than a lack of trust in others. His attitude to his wife Louise is dictated by pity; "he was bound by the pathos of her unattractiveness" (23). She reminds him of "a joint under a meat-cover" (17); and as "he watched her through the muslin net . . . her face had the yellow ivory tinge of atabrine: her hair which had once been the colour of bottled honey was dark and stringy with sweat. These were the times of ugliness when he loved her, when pity and responsibility reached the intensity of a passion" (15). Since it "had always been his responsibility to maintain happiness in those he loved" (20), he was bound to the oath he had made to himself at their marriage: "No man can guarantee love for ever, but he had sworn fourteen years ago, at Ealing, silently during the little horrible elegant ceremony among the lace and candles, that he would at least always see to it that she was happy" (65). Because of this, "it was his habit to cry her name, a habit he had formed in the days of anxiety and love. The less he needed Louise the more conscious he became of his responsibility for her happiness" (14). He had made this vow, even though he had full knowledge of "what experience had taught him -- that no human being can really understand another, and no one can arrange another's happiness" (93).

Scobie, not content with pitying the Portuguese captain, and Mrs Perrot because of her marriage to a horrible husband, now pities Helen Rolt, his mistress. He convinces himself that the relationship is free from lust on his part:



He was more than thirty years the older: his body in this climate had lost the sense of lust: he watched her with sadness and affection and enormous pity because a time would come when he couldn't show her around in a world where she was at sea. When she turned and the light fell on her face she looked ugly, with the temporary ugliness of a child. The ugliness was like handcuffs on his wrists. (188)

Scobie further believes that by protecting Helen from the advances of the dissolute airman Bagster, he is doing her a favour. He does not, however, ever seem to be aware of the pride inherent in such an assumption; the assumption that adultery with him is more to be preferred than fornication with Bagster. Helen herself realizes that Scobie pities rather than loves her, and flares up at him:

She said furiously, "I don't want your pity." But it was not a question of whether she wanted it -- she had it. Pity smouldered like decay at his heart. He would never rid himself of it. He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed. Nothing ever diminished pity. The conditions of life nurtured it. There was only one person in the world who was unpitiable -- himself. (211)

Greene depicts Scobie as a man "too ready to play the part of a pseudo-providence."<sup>21</sup> Scobie does not simulate the Passion of Christ, but monstrously parodies it. In The Ministry of Fear, Arthur Rowe observes, "One can't love humanity. One can only love people."<sup>22</sup> Scobie does not heed this advice, as he tries to bear the brunt of all human suffering; and instead of loving humanity, he insults it by pitying it. Louise, despite her vapidity, gets to the root of Scobie's problem:

"There was a time when you wanted to retire too. You used to count the years. You made plans -- for all of us."

"Oh well, one changes," he said.

She said mercilessly, "You didn't think you'd be alone with me then."



He pressed his sweating hand against hers. "What nonsense you talk, dear. You must get up and have some food. . . ."

"Do you love anyone, Ticki, except yourself?" (18-19)

Scobie's relationship with his wife is reminiscent of Edward's with Lavinia in Eliot's Cocktail Party, or Pinkie's with Rose in Greene's Brighton Rock. There is something lacking in each of these relationships, for the loving response is totally absent. Scobie himself bases all relationships on the comforting lie: "The truth, he thought, has never been of any real value to any human being -- it is a symbol for mathematicians and philosophers to pursue. In human relations kindness and lies are worth a thousand truths" (64).

Kathleen Nott's strictures on Graham Greene are interesting and rewarding in this context. She claims that "Greene never shows the effects of Catholicism on the temperamentally cheerful and balanced, yet some of these people must surely exist without being too insensitive to merit either attention or salvation."<sup>23</sup> In the case of Pinkie and Scobie, this remark is very true, since neither is really a balanced character. Pinkie is twisted and warped by childhood events; and Scobie has been profoundly influenced by an event of the past -- the death of his daughter Catherine. Marcel More says that Scobie is a masochist for blaming himself for his daughter's death and having guilt feelings about it, and he also labels Scobie as a "psychasthenic."<sup>24</sup>

Scobie's mental equilibrium has been upset. He retreats into himself; his office, for instance, is "a bare uncomfortable room, but to Scobie it was home" (6). He has "built [this] home by a process of



reduction. He had started out fifteen years ago with far more than this. There had been a photograph of his wife, bright leather cushions from the market, an easy-chair, a large coloured map of the port on the wall" (7). Later in the novel, we are told that "he had cut down his own needs to a minimum, photographs were put away in drawers, the dead were put out of mind" (140-41). Scobie is neurotically attached to the colony, and seems to have a natural affinity for Greene's symbols of evil:

Why, he wondered, swerving the car to avoid a dead pye-dog, do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst . . . (33)

Scobie likes the colony, with its vultures, cockroaches and heat -- and all of these things are Greene's symbols of evil.

Scobie is also shown as being weary of life, and in the light of this, his suicide is no longer surprising: "It seemed to Scobie that life was immeasurably long. Couldn't the test of man have been carried out in fewer years? Couldn't we have committed our first major sin at seven, have ruined ourselves for love or hate at ten, have clutched at redemption on a fifteen-year-old death-bed?" (56).

And like Pinkie Brown, Scobie dreams of peace interminably:

He had nearly everything, and all he needed was peace. Everything meant work, the daily regular routine in the little bare office, the change of seasons in a place he loved. How often had he been pitied for the austerity of the work, the bareness of the rewards. . . . If he had been young again this was the life he would have chosen to



live: only this time he would not have expected any other person to share it with him, the rat upon the bath, the lizard on the wall, the tornado blowing open the windows at one in the morning, and the last pink light upon the laterite roads at sundown. (65)

His conception of peace is surprising, to say the least: ". . . he dreamed of peace by day and night. Once in sleep it had appeared to him as the great glowing shoulder of the moon heaving across his window like an iceberg, Arctic and destructive in the moment before the world was struck . . ." (66). Peace, for Scobie, is always pictured in terms of solitude; for instance, he reads his police reports "crouched under the rusting handcuffs in the locked office" (66); and his dream of "perfect happiness and freedom" is one where "he was walking through a wide cool meadow with Ali at his heels: there was nobody else anywhere in his dream, and Ali never spoke" (91).

Scobie's neuroticism has given him a pessimistic, deeply-distorted view of life; he comes to believe that it was a good thing that his daughter died after all, since if she "had lived, she too would have been conscriptable, flung into some grim dormitory to find her way. After the Atlantic, the A.T.S. or the W.A.A.F., the blustering sergeant with the big bust, the cook-house and the potato peelings, the Lesbian officer with the thin lips and the tidy gold hair, and the men waiting on the Common outside the camp, among the gorse bushes . . ." (186).

Having thus discussed Major Scobie as a man and police officer, it is now necessary to evaluate him as a Roman Catholic, and here too, he is shown as deficient in certain qualities. Quite early in the



novel, mention is made of a "broken rosary" (10) among the objects accumulated in Scobie's desk. He always means to get it mended, but never does. The rosary is a Catholic sacramental, and is symbolic of the life of faith lived according to the dictates of religion. It is highly significant, therefore, that Scobie's is broken and is never mended. The broken rosary symbolises broken faith, and it is significant also that this is the object which Scobie sends to Ali to lure him to his doom; bad faith is thus shown on a spiritual level, and also in the sphere of human relationships. The broken rosary is also contrasted with Louise's whole one -- though perhaps too much cannot be made of this point, since Louise's brand of religion is also defective; she uses her religion as a weapon against her husband.

Louise accuses Scobie of lack of faith -- "You haven't got much faith have you, Ticki?" (19). And this is truer than Louise realizes; for prayer to Scobie is convention only: "He said the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and then, as sleep began to clog his lids, he added an act of contrition. It was a formality, not because he felt himself free from serious sin but because it had never occurred to him that his life was important enough one way or another. He didn't drink, he didn't fornicate, he didn't even lie, but he never regarded this absence of sin as virtue" (130). But Scobie does lie, even if his lies are well-meaning, and later on he does commit what are, to the Catholic, grievous sexual sins. Scobie is shown also as lacking in faith when he goes to confession. He tells Father Rank,



"'I don't know how to put it, Father, but I feel -- tired of my religion. It seems to mean nothing to me. I've tried to love God, but --' he made a gesture which the priest could not see, turned sideways through the grille. 'I'm not sure that I even believe'" (180).

Scobie as a Catholic is guilty of the sins of adultery, despair, and suicide. He knows that adultery is a sin, "a deordination of sex from its true and appointed end,"<sup>25</sup> and he knows that the Church teaches that sinful acts involve moral guilt which must be repented of. Scobie himself reflects: "But human beings were condemned to consequences. The responsibility as well as the guilt was his -- he was not a Bagster: he knew what he was about . . . Lying back on the pillow he stared sleeplessly out towards the grey early morning tide. Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, nor Helen" (192). The victim is of course Christ, and the motif of betrayal is given -- "Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn" (192). Even as Peter denied Christ as the cocks crowed, so does Scobie betray Christ by sinning.

When Helen asks for some sign as proof that Scobie loves her, he sits down and writes her a note, confessing "I love you more than myself, more than my wife, more than God I think" (215). Even if this is genuine (and knowing Scobie's penchant for the comforting lie, one suspects that it is not), Scobie errs in putting the creature before the creator; as a Catholic he knows that God is to be loved



above everything else. And if one loves God, one naturally strives as much as possible, to keep His commandments. But Scobie lacks trust in God, and in God's agents. He refuses to make a good confession and get the burden of his sins off his mind. Of Father Rank, Scobie wonders: "Could I shift my burden there . . . could I tell him that I love two women: that I don't know what to do? What would be the use? I know the answers as well as he does. One should look after one's own soul at whatever cost to another, and that's what I can't do, what I shall never be able to do" (219). But this is to push one's sense of responsibility to a ridiculous extreme -- there is no selfishness attached to the saving of one's soul; indeed, the Church insists that we are to think first of ourselves, when the matter is that of salvation: "Not only must a man love himself, but in the matter of his eternal salvation, at least, he must love himself more than any other created person. God is to be loved above all things; then myself; then my neighbour for God's sake."<sup>26</sup>

Scobie knows perfectly how to solve his problem; he knows he should confess, gain absolution, and promise amendment of life. He makes a half-hearted attempt at confession, but he is not in a truly repentant mood, and does not promise to leave Helen alone. Absolution is thereupon rightly refused him. He makes the following prayer to God: "Give me trust in your mercy to the one I abandon" (265). But later, he is shown as having no trust in his creator: "No. I don't trust you. I love you, but I've never trusted you . . . I can't shift my responsibility to you. If I could, I would be someone else. I



can't make one of them suffer so as to save myself. I'm responsible and I'll see it through the only way I can" (316-17). But Scobie here contradicts himself; if he does not trust God, he obviously does not love Him; for love cannot exist without trust.

Scobie is guilty of the sin of presumption. Aquinas says: "Just as, through despair, a man despises the Divine Mercy, on which hope relies, so, through presumption, he despises the Divine Justice, which punishes the sinner."<sup>27</sup> Scobie certainly is shown as despising Divine Justice, and hoping that he will escape damnation, even though he intends to go on sinning: he reflects, "The priest told you it was the unforgiveable sin, the final expression of unrepentant despair, and of course one accepted the Church's teaching. But they also taught that God had broken his own laws, and was it more impossible for him to put out a hand of forgiveness in the suicidal darkness and chaos than to have woken himself in the tomb, behind the stone?"

(227)

Scobie by his actions illustrates both kinds of presumption, as defined by St. Thomas. The first kind is when "a man relies on his own power, when he attempts something beyond his power, as though it were possible to him. Such like presumption clearly arises from vainglory."<sup>28</sup> Now obviously Scobie is being presumptuous when he sees himself in the role of God. The second kind of presumption practised by Scobie, is "an inordinate trust in the Divine Mercy or power, consisting in the hope of obtaining . . . pardon without repentance. Such like presumption seems to arise directly from pride,



as though a man thought so much of himself as to esteem that God would not punish him or exclude him from glory, however much he might be a sinner."<sup>29</sup> For Scobie, in expecting the "hand of forgiveness" from God when he has done little to deserve it, is obviously being presumptuous in the sense defined by Aquinas. St Thomas is careful to make distinctions between sinful acts: "To sin with the intention of persevering in sin and through the hope of being pardoned, is presumptuous, and this does not diminish, but increases sin. To sin, however, with the hope of obtaining pardon some time, and with the intention of refraining from sin and of repenting of it, is not presumption, but diminishes sin, because this seems to indicate a will less hardened in sin."<sup>30</sup>

Scobie, then, is guilty of vainglory because he assumes the role of providence; he is guilty of presumption because he presumes too much on God's mercy; and finally, he is guilty of the sin of suicide, "a violation of the divine precept not to kill."<sup>31</sup>

Here it is convenient to argue the case for and against Scobie. A beginning might be made by assessing Scobie's attempt to exchange his chances of salvation for the happiness of Louise and Helen. Louise takes Scobie to Mass as a test, and urges him to take communion. Scobie takes communion unworthily, in a state of serious mortal sin. He knows that he will not repent of his behaviour, and so will be damned. He makes his offer of damnation as the priest approaches him along the communion rail, bearing the Host: ". . . with open mouth (the time had come) he made one last attempt at



prayer, 'O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them,' and was aware of the pale papery taste of his eternal sentence on the tongue" (272).

Now this is essentially a meaningless exchange. God does not enter into bargains with his creatures; and for a creature to attempt to bargain with his creator, implies that the created is putting himself on an equal footing with God. This is again the sin of presumption. Secondly, Scobie is at this stage so sunk in mortal sin, that he has nothing valuable to bargain with. Of this bargain, Waugh commented: "To me the idea of willing my own damnation for the love of God is either a very loose poetical expression or a mad blasphemy, for the God who accepted that sacrifice could be neither just nor lovable."<sup>32</sup> The error is Waugh's in assuming that Scobie made the offer out of love of God; for as has conclusively been proved, Scobie loves neither God nor his fellowmen. And it was not really a "sacrifice," since Scobie may well be due for damnation anyway. It is a specious and meretricious attempt to make his sins look attractive.

Canon Joseph Cartmell comments:

I do not think that Mr Greene means to assign any real value to [Scobie's] offering. You cannot do evil that good may come of it. Such an offering could have no worth with God. . . . Indeed, no positive good came of Scobie's death. Neither Louise nor Helen Rolt was morally uplifted by his act. The only good was a negative one, the removal of himself as a source of sin to them. Scobie was in fact a very bad moral coward. He could have escaped from his entanglement by a comparatively simple resolution. He would not take it. His attempt to give an air of moral respectability to his sins and his suicide, as though they were helping others, was, objectively, pure sham.<sup>33</sup>



Thus we have witnessed in Scobie a total picture of degeneration.

In Book 1 he lies to his wife, and is derelict in his official duties.

In Book 2 he pursues what he would have us believe is a joyless affair with Helen; and in Book 3 he is implicated in the murder of Ali, and commits suicide; the final link in a chain of actions leading to spiritual death.

Next to be examined is Scobie's holocaust of peace. In Book 2, a dying child is brought over from the ship the Germans have sunk. Scobie watches over it in the dispensary at Pende, and is moved by its sufferings --- "The breathing broke, choked, began again with terrible effort. Looking between his fingers he could see the six-year-old face convulsed like a navvy's with labour" (143). It is then that Scobie makes perhaps the only charitable action he undertakes in the entire novel: "'Father,' he prayed, 'give her peace. Take away my peace for ever, but give her peace.' The sweat broke out on his hands" (143).

Aquinas, in defining what a holocaust is, quotes St Gregory who makes the distinction between sacrifice and holocaust. People who give to the needy out of their superfluity are engaged in an act of sacrifice, "since they offer up something to God and keep back something for themselves; whereas those who keep nothing for themselves offer a holocaust, which is greater than sacrifice."<sup>34</sup> Aquinas also says that a holocaust "is the offering to God all that one has."<sup>35</sup> Scobie offers God his peace, and we know how jealously Scobie treasures that. (Greene explains the significance of this act



in the pages of Dieu Vivant: "Obviously one did have in mind that when he offered up his peace for the child it was genuine prayer and had the results that followed. I always believe that such results, though obviously a God would not fulfil them to the limit of robbing him of peace for ever, are answered up to a point as a test of a man's sincerity and to see whether in fact the offer was one merely based on emotion."<sup>36</sup> This is a loose and confusing "explanation." What does "the results that followed" mean? Scobie's peace was invaded by Helen Rolt -- is the implication, then, that God is responsible for Scobie's fornication? The rest of the novel shows the professional and moral decline of Major Scobie: Is Greene telling us that God was responsible for this? It is a curious "explanation." However, Scobie's action here was genuine -- we have the author's word for that -- and the motivation presumably was that of compassion). This one major good deed, amid a plethora of bad deeds, does much to redeem Scobie.

Another extenuating circumstance that we must bear in mind is that Scobie never really received any guidance from Father Rank. The anonymous reviewer in The Times Literary Supplement mentions that Father Rank's "inadequacy as a spiritual adviser is hinted at but never analysed."<sup>37</sup> Fathers Rank and Clay, the two priests in The Heart of The Matter, are as useless as their confrère, Father James Browne, in The Living Room. Greene almost seems to be saying that the gift of the Holy Ghost at ordination is no guarantee of the social or spiritual usefulness of a priest when he has to give advice to the



distressed.

We are told that Father Rank has been twenty-two years in the colony; and he is another of Graham Greene's seedy failures, this time in a soutane. He is described in hardly complimentary phrases; we are told that "his geniality filled the room with hollow sound" (78); mention is made of his "hollow laugh" (79); and when he laughs, the sound is like the bell of a "leper proclaiming his misery" (80). He has been twelve years without leave; and he knows himself to be a useless priest -- in conversation with Scobie, he says:

"The dying . . . that's what I'm here for. They send for me when they are dying." He raised eyes bleary with too much quinine and said harshly and hopelessly, "I've never been of any good to the living, Scobie."

"You are talking nonsense, Father."

"When I was a novice, I thought that people talked to their priests, and I thought God somehow gave the right words. . . . God doesn't give the right words, Scobie. I had a parish once in Northampton. . . . They used to ask me out to tea, and I'd sit and watch their hands pouring out, and we'd talk of the Children of Mary and repairs to the church roof. . . . I wasn't of any use to a single living soul, Scobie. I thought, in Africa things will be different. You see I'm not a reading man, Scobie: I never had much talent for loving God as some people do. I wanted to be of use, that's all. . . . I haven't talked like this for five years. Except to the mirror. If people are in trouble they'd go to you, Scobie, not to me. They ask me to dinner to hear the gossip. And if you were in trouble where would you go?" (218-19)

Father Rank, then, is depicted as a broken reed. He is depressed, unsure of himself, more needing of advice than capable of giving it. And neither is Father Clay shown as a priest in whom one could confide. Father Clay is the missionary at Bamba, where Scobie goes to investigate the suicide of Pemberton, the young District



Commissioner. The only other Britisher within miles of Pemberton, the priest was unable to help the young man and to prevent his death. This cleric is a younger edition of Father Rank, equally depressed, over-anxious, and useless; with his "short red hair and his young freckled Liverpool face," he is described as being unable to sit still for more than a few minutes at a time, and then he would be up, pacing his tiny room from hideous oleograph to plaster statue and back to oleograph again. "I saw so little of him," he wailed, motioning with his hands as though he were at the altar. "He cared for nothing but cards and drinking. I don't drink and I've never played cards -- except demon, you know, except demon, and that's a patience. It's terrible, terrible." (94)

Father Clay also confesses to loneliness: "'You know, Major Scobie, for weeks and months nothing happens here at all. I just walk up and down here, up and down, and then suddenly out of the blue . . . it's terrible.' His eyes were red and sleepless: he seemed to Scobie one of those who are quite unsuited to loneliness. There were no books to be seen except a little shelf with his breviary and a few religious tracts. He was a man without resources" (96). The lack of contact between Father Clay and Pemberton is symptomatic of the priest-layman relationship in the novel. Perhaps if Scobie had had the assistance of a wise priest, he might have acted differently; even so, Scobie himself knew his Church's rules as well as Fathers Rank or Clay did; Scobie at one point reflected: "The trouble is . . . we know the answers -- we Catholics are damned by our knowledge" (264).

Scobie knows the Church's attitude to suicide; he has heard it enunciated by Father Clay: "'Suicide,' Father Clay said. 'It's



terrible. It puts a man outside mercy . . .'" (95). But Scobie tries to justify his action on the ground that Christ had been a suicide: "Christ had not been murdered. You couldn't murder God: Christ had killed himself: he had hung himself on the Cross as surely as Pemberton from the picture-rail" (227). Also in extenuation of his sin, he prays, "They wouldn't need me if I were dead. No one needs the dead. The dead can be forgotten. O God, give me death before I give them unhappiness" (227).

Scobie's suicide is not a sudden impulsive act, but a carefully planned design; he goes so far as to falsify the events in his diary so that the impression is conveyed that he died of a heart attack. Just before he does this rash act, he has a colloquy with God; Scobie tells God that he will not go on insulting Him "month after month" by taking Communion. "I can't do that. You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all. I know what I'm doing. I'm not pleading for mercy. I am going to damn myself, whatever that means. I've longed for peace and I'm never going to know peace again. But you'll be at peace when I am out of your reach" (315).

God is pictured as replying:

You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me -- rob me of you forever. I made you with love. I've wept your tears. . . . And now you push me away, you put me out of your reach. . . . Can't you trust me as you'd trust a faithful dog? . . . All you have to do now is ring a bell, go into a box, confess . . . the repentance is already there, straining at your heart. If you must, continue rejecting me but without lies any more. Go to your house and say good-bye to your wife and live with your mistress. If you live you will come back to me sooner or later. One of them will suffer, but can't you trust me to see that the suffering isn't too great? (316)



But Scobie, sunk in presumption, will not trust God, and kills himself. He dies with the ambiguous words, "Dear God, I love . . ." on his lips. It is not explained whom he loves -- whether God, Louise, Helen, or himself. Greene says that this was deliberately done, and explains: "My own intention was to make it completely vague as to whether he was expressing his love for the two women or his love for God. My own feeling about this character is that he was uncertain himself and that was why the thing broke off. The point I would like to make is that at the moment of death even an expression of sexual love comes within the borders of charity."<sup>38</sup>

By applying the strict rules of the Church, Scobie is damned. Louise definitely believes this -- witness the conversation between herself and Father Rank at the novel's end:

"He was a bad Catholic."

"That's the silliest phrase in common use," Father Rank said.

"And at the end this -- horror. He must have known that he was damning himself."

"Yes, he knew that all right. He never had any trust in mercy -- except for other people."

"It's no good even praying. . . ."

Father Rank clapped the cover of the diary to and said furiously, "For goodness' sake, Mrs Scobie, don't imagine you -- or I -- know a thing about God's mercy."

"The Church says . . ."

"I know the Church says. The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart." (333)

Father Rank offers the same consolations that the old priest in Brighton Rock had offered to the distraught Rose; hope in the "appalling strangeness of the mercy of God." But it must be remembered that Father Rank does not know Scobie as intimately as the reader does; and the reader is in possession of several facts about Scobie



which Father Rank does not know. Scobie is guilty of a number of sins, errors, and of muddled theological thinking.

Scobie's main failure as a human being is in his pitying others. He himself, however, does not want to become the victim of pity -- "The worst was when he detected in his colleagues an extra warmth of friendliness towards himself, as though they pitied him" (29). He never sees Louise as an individual in her own right, but thinks of her as an object to be humoured -- "It occurred to him, as it hadn't occurred to him for years, that she loved him: poor dear, she loved him: she was someone of human stature with her own sense of responsibility, not simply the object of his care and kindness" (235).

Scobie lies; he connives in the murder of Ali; and he sins grievously, against Helen and against God, by committing adultery: although he tries to excuse himself on the ground that he felt no lust in so doing.

Scobie is guilty of several theological errors. He feels himself superior to God, and tries to do what he thinks God cannot do. In typical muddled thinking, Scobie sees his death as paralleling the crucifixion. He thinks that going to Communion in mortal sin is "striking God when he's down -- in my power" (253). But God cannot be hurt in this fashion; it is the unworthy recipient who hurts himself. Scobie also prays, "Make me put my own soul frist" (265), thus giving the impression that it is wrong to save one's soul; whereas, of course, the Christian's duty is to think of himself first



of all, when it comes to salvation.

Scobie perverts logic by associating hope with evil and despair with the good: "Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim. It is, one is told, the unforgivable sin, but it is a sin the corrupt and evil man never practises. He always has hope. He never reaches the freezing point of knowing absolute failure. Only the man of goodwill carries always in his heart this capacity for damnation" (67).

In considering Scobie's adultery, it is rewarding to read what a theologian has to say about love. Etienne Gilson comments: "The moral problem is not whether one should love but what one should love."<sup>39</sup> Gilson then goes on to quote St Augustine: "Are you told not to love anything? Not at all! If you are to love nothing, you would be lifeless, dead, detestable, miserable. Love, but be careful what you love."<sup>40</sup> Father Rank claims that Scobie may have loved God. But the reader of the book knows this is untrue. Scobie has broken "the greatest commandment," as enunciated in Matthew 22: 37-40, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. That is the greatest commandment. It comes first. The second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. Everything in the Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments."

In the light of the preceding strictures, therefore, why does Graham Greene have Father Rank hold out hope for Scobie? Because God's mercy, as the priest claims, truly is boundless. The poem Louise reads from Rilke



We are all falling. This hand's falling too --  
 all have this falling sickness none withstands.  
 And yet there's always One whose gentle hands  
 this universal falling can't fall through (323)

is indicative of Scobie's own situation. There is also the possibility that between the taking of the poison and his death Scobie may truly have repented, and regretted his sinful act. As Gilson points out, on the subject of intention:

The law often punishes actions that are not bad at all, and tolerates others that are. It is not concerned with moral good and evil, but rather with the maintenance of social order; and hence the extreme importance it attaches to the execution or non-execution of the wrongful act. It is not so with God; He, and He alone, takes account not so much of what we do as the spirit in which it is done, and in all truth, He weighs our guilt by the intention: veraciter in intentione nostra reatum pensat; and, adds Abelard, that is precisely why it is written in Jeremiah that He searches the reins and hearts: "Seeing, in a most wonderful manner, what none other sees, He takes no account of actions when He punishes sin, but the intention only, while we, on the contrary, take no account of the intention which quite escapes us, but punish the action which we see."<sup>41</sup>

--- all of which sounds like Greene's own statement, "We are saved or damned by our thoughts, and not by our actions."<sup>42</sup>

Greene, as is obvious from the epigraph affixed to the novel, is following Péguy in his attitude to the sinner. Scobie as a sinner, is aware of spiritual realities in a way that the conventionally pious Louise is not. Scobie is a kind of sinning Everyman, while Louise represents conventional Christianity. And it is implied at the end of the novel that even such a monstrous sinner as Scobie may be touched by grace, as Greene uses his favourite image: "It seemed to him [Scobie] as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was there.



He got to his feet and heard the hammer of his heart beating out a reply. He had a message to convey, but the darkness and the storm drove it back within the case of his breast, and all the time outside the house, outside the world that drummed like hammer blows within his ear, someone wandered, seeking to get in, someone appealing for help, someone in need of him" (325).

But Greene in this novel, as in Brighton Rock, seems to push Péguy's paradox so far as to make it seem ridiculous. Scobie hardly seems a credible character, and Greene seems to throw the book at him by loading upon his character's unfortunate head as many sins as he could think of. Naturally this proves irritating; Kettle declares that in reading the novel, "one has . . . constantly the sense of the screw being turned, not in order to satisfy the developing needs of the novel as a work of art but in order to satisfy Graham Greene's abstract convictions. The whole thing, though extraordinarily slick, is too glib to stand up to any searching questions regarding its convincingness."<sup>43</sup> Orwell makes the thoroughly sensible point that if Scobie "were capable of getting into the kind of mess that is described, he would have got into it earlier . . . if he believed in Hell, he would not risk going there merely to spare the feelings of a couple of neurotic women."<sup>44</sup>

Sean O'Faolain complains that the novel is "rigged." He observes, "Greene had manipulated his character into a neurotic state of mind, with a neurotic wife, in a corner of Africa, in a corner of his conscience, with a far from intelligent priest, so that there



should be no escape from his problem but suicide."<sup>45</sup> O'Faolain deflates the pretentiousness of this novel by producing a reductio ad absurdum: he suggests that Scobie, instead of poisoning himself, should have poisoned Louise and married Helen, then spent the rest of his life repenting.

The novel, and Scobie, are interesting from a theological point of view. But it is also pretentious, implausible, and incredible; as well as being a repository of confusion, as mentioned earlier. As Martin Turnell grumbles, and rightly so, Greene set out to write a "theological thriller" about a Catholic gambling with his soul, which leaves us in doubt (as it was bound to) about the results of Scobie's "last throw." The protagonist is "rigged." What seems to have happened is that situation preceded character as it would in an adventure story. The result is that we have an incredible character used as an inadequate illustration of an impossible thesis.<sup>46</sup>



## CHAPTER VII

### THE LEAP TO SAINTHOOD:

#### THE END OF THE AFFAIR

With The End of The Affair, Greene comes to the end of the "Catholic quartet": that is, those novels in which the main characters are Catholics, and whose specific problems can best be surveyed from the standpoint of Catholic theology. Greene is retelling in this novel the Biblical story of Mary Magdalene, the woman who gave up a life of sexual misdemeanours for a life of holiness. With his liking for extreme situations, Greene again tackles the problem of the sanctification of the sinner in this excursion into twentieth-century hagiography. The characteristic Greene anti-hero, tormented and guilty, appears as Maurice Bendrix, a novelist not of the first rank who has not yet been "damned" by being a popular success. The characteristic Greene atmosphere is also present, though it is less sombre than usual -- the action takes place during the German bombings of London in the Second World War.

Maurice Bendrix is telling his own story in the novel. It is the story of his affair with Sarah Miles, the wife of Henry Miles, a civil servant. Bendrix, writing a novel whose main character is a civil servant, unashamedly decides to use Sarah as his primary source



of information on the behaviour of civil servants, and hypocritically assumes an interest in Henry's doings. Eventually, Sarah and Bendrix become lovers. Suddenly and inexplicably, however, Sarah ends the relationship, and the jealously bitter Bendrix is left thinking that she has managed to acquire a newer lover. Henry, the cuckolded husband, thinks so too, and mentions to Bendrix that he had considered setting a detective on her trail. Henry is ashamed of himself and of his suspicions and does not pursue this plan, but Bendrix sets himself the task of engaging Parkis, an investigator working for the Savage Detective Agency, to spy on Sarah and ferret out her secret. Parkis announces that Sarah has been visiting a Mr Smythe, and later succeeds in purloining Sarah's diary. Reading it, Bendrix discovers to his amazement that Sarah had made a vow to God to give him up, and that this God, in short, is Sarah's new lover. Bendrix thereupon concludes that if it is simply a contest between himself and God, then he must win since he is a man of flesh and blood, whereas God is but a theological abstraction. He makes plans for the future: Sarah must leave Henry and go away with him. Sarah refuses to see him, flees to escape his attentions, is caught in a shower of rain, and dies of pneumonia a few days later. The story does not end there, however; in what may well be regarded as a concluding unscientific postscript, Sarah works three minor miracles, and at the novel's end the skeptical Bendrix is seen working away from the position of unbeliever to that of the person who, although doubting, yet cannot be sure that God does not exist. If He does



exist, Bendrix will continue to treat Him as a mortal enemy, the one who destroys human beings' plans for happiness.

Technically, the novel is a triumph of professional novelistic skill. There is in it the use of melodrama, and the technique of the "thriller" -- there is some degree of mystery and suspense over the revelation of Sarah's new lover. Greene also employs the device of the flashback, and the time scheme is not linear or progressive, but involved and convoluted. The events of the novel take place over the period 1939-1946, but the events of 1939-1944 are told through flashback as Bendrix reminisces. There is also the deployment of Sarah's diary, from which one gains Sarah's point of view of events -- this diary complements the account given by Bendrix, since it gives facts which Bendrix could not have known before. The novel is structurally divided into five books, four told from the point of view of the narrator, Bendrix; while Book 3 is given over to Sarah's diary.

Bendrix's first contact with Henry and Sarah took place in the summer of 1939, when Bendrix began "to write a story with a senior civil servant as the main character."<sup>1</sup> This story was never written, although it could be argued that in writing his own story, Bendrix in effect cannot help writing that of Henry also. Indeed, in the later sections of the novel, after Sarah's death, Henry and Bendrix are drawn together; and Henry emerges as a character in his own right, and not simply as the shadowy figure of the complaisant lover cuckolded by an unfaithful wife. Bendrix, however, deliberately



begins the story in January 1946, since "a story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead" (1). There is a flashback to June 1944, the last date on which Bendrix had been in contact with Henry and Sarah -- thus, when the story opens, Bendrix is reminiscing over an affair which ended one and a half years ago.

Since Henry James, point of view as an important part of a writer's technique has received considerable emphasis. In The End of The Affair, we see the story from the point of view of the first person narrator, Bendrix, the person who has the greatest stake in the events he narrates. This is a feature which Greene adopts also in The Quiet American. The limitations of a first-person narrator are obvious: "The protagonist-narrator . . . is limited almost entirely to his own thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Similarly, the angle of view is that of the fixed centre."<sup>2</sup> "I" is limited to the extent that he can narrate only what he believes, thinks, hears or sees. By use of the diary, then, Greene is able to get around the limitations inherent in the use of the first-person narrator. But if the first-person method of narration has its limitations, it also has its advantages; for it "makes for intimacy and facilitates reader identification, drawing the reader readily into the emotional life of the character; he shares more readily the hero's anxieties and joys. First person intensifies the narrative and adds to its emotional impact."<sup>3</sup> Further, it lends "immediacy and intensity of emotion, an intimate tone of narration, credibility, heated prose, reader



identification."<sup>4</sup> The End of The Affair achieves compactness and unity by the dramatic use of Bendrix as the character-in-the-story telling the story. The reader becomes aware of ironies not realized by Bendrix; as an unsympathetic character (at the outset), the first-person device allows Greene to condemn him, not by overt authorial intrusion, but by having Bendrix condemn himself out of his own mouth.

The situation is all the more ironically complex, perhaps, when it is realized that Bendrix is himself a writer by profession. He is both author-creator and at the same time, a character in his creation. As author, this involves the functions of selecting, discarding, creating, imposing order. At the end of his narrative he is left with the profoundly disturbing thought that perhaps there is a supreme novelist-creator, God, who manipulates human characters as Bendrix the writer creates and manipulates the creatures of his own imagination --

Always when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive. There is nothing psychologically false about him, but he sticks, he has to be pushed around, words have to be found for him, all the technical skill I have acquired through the laborious years has to be employed in making him appear alive to my readers. Sometimes I get a sour satisfaction when a reviewer praises him as the best-drawn character in the story: if he has not been drawn he has certainly been dragged. . . . Every other character helps, he only hinders.

And yet one cannot do without him. I can imagine a God feeling in just that way about some of us. The saints, one would suppose, in a sense create themselves. They come alive. They are capable of the surprising act or word. They stand outside the plot, unconditioned by it. But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of non-existence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will, whose only importance



is that somewhere, at some time, we help to furnish the scene in which a living character moves and speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the opportunities for their free will. (229)

Bendrix is one of the characters that God has to push around, nudging him gently in the direction he should go. But Bendrix, like the characters he labours with as writer, refuses to be pushed around, refuses to stay within the contours of the plot.

The position of the writer demands some kind of objectivity. Like Thomas Fowler, the journalist in The Quiet American, he must try to be degagé. But Bendrix is trapped in a peculiar situation: as a writer, he must give an objective statement of events, yet as a person intimately caught up in the web of those events, he cannot be detached. Yet he is objective enough about himself; he knows himself to be egocentric -- "When I was young not even a love affair would alter my schedule. A love affair had to begin after lunch, and however late I might be in getting to bed -- so long as I slept in my own bed -- I would read the morning's work over and sleep on it" (36). As a lover, he must feel superior to the loved one -- "beautiful women, especially if they are intelligent also, stir some deep feeling of inferiority in me. I don't know whether psychologists have yet named the Cophetua complex, but I have always found it hard to feel desire without some sense of superiority, mental or physical" (25). He pries into Sarah and Henry's life, seeing them at first merely as grist for his novelistic mill. His hatred and jealousy are insisted upon: "I hated Henry -- I hated his wife Sarah too" (1); and he calls his narrative "a record of hate far more than of love" (1).



Bendrix is a totally believable, though unsympathetic, character. There are people whose sense of inferiority and unworthiness causes them to act as Bendrix does. His jealousy, bitterness, superiority and hate is explained by the reasons Bendrix himself gives for his teasing attitude to Henry -- "There are men whom one has an irresistible desire to tease: men whose virtues one doesn't share" (3). There is also a psychological explanation for his conduct with other people -- he may be compensating for a physical defect, his limp. And of course, his attitude to Sarah after she left him can be explained on the ground that he felt she had thrown him over -- and thwarted love, not improbably, can be replaced by a festering hate, as Bendrix explains: "Hatred seems to operate the same glands as love: it even produces the same actions. If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ?" (26-27).

Walter Allen believes that Greene in this novel "succeeded only in perverting a brilliant rendering of obsessive jealousy into a pious tract."<sup>5</sup> Since Greene does not preach, the novel can hardly be dismissed thus summarily; and to read the novel simply as a story about Bendrix's jealousy is to be unconscious of the fact that the story is not simply about Bendrix. Bendrix himself realizes this, when he writes that it is "the story of Sarah, Henry and, of course, that third, whom I hated without yet knowing him, or even believing in him" (36). There are intimations of God at work throughout the



novel; Bendrix refers to Him as "that other, in whom in those days we were lucky enough not to believe" (1); and he and Sarah "had agreed so happily to eliminate [Him] from [their] world" (79).

If one agrees with Eliot that "the recognition of the reality of sin is a new life,"<sup>6</sup> then one can see that the novel is as much concerned with Sarah, whose life begins anew after being made aware of this fact. Sarah, hitherto a fugitive from God, finds out that there must ultimately be an end to running. It is the pattern that Greene had earlier used in The Power and The Glory: "the pattern of the novel of suspense -- the trap, pursuit and flight, the tracking down of a fugitive -- has a close parallel in the religious drama of salvation and redemption; and Greene used the first to reinforce and underline the second."<sup>7</sup>

In this novel Greene once more has one of his characters bargaining with God. Before exploring this further, it is perhaps necessary to mention one of the incidents in the novel which later has ironic reverberations. Book 1 of the novel opens on a wet and windy January night of 1946, when Bendrix, going out for a drink at the local pub, on leaving his lodgings casually refers to "the steps which had been blasted in 1944 and never repaired. I had reason to remember the occasion and how the stained glass, tough and ugly and Victorian, stood up to the shock as our grandfathers themselves would have done" (2). Not until Book 3, when the revelations of Sarah's diary are given, does Bendrix or the reader understand the full significance of that occasion. In Chapter 5 of Book 2, indeed



Bendrix gives us further details of this incident, but even then he is unaware of the real import of the event he narrates.

On June 17, 1944 the Germans had made a bombing raid over London. Sarah and Bendrix were in bed at the time; and Bendrix, going downstairs to check on his landlady's safety, was trapped under the fallen doorway. He recovers, returning to the bedroom to find Sarah kneeling in prayer. Sarah tells him, "I thought you were dead;" and again, "I knew for certain you were dead" (84). Later, from the evidence of the diary, Bendrix and the reader learn that Sarah, on finding Bendrix dead, had prayed to the God in whom she did not believe: "Let him be alive, and I will believe. Give him a chance. Let him have his happiness. Do this and I'll believe. But this wasn't enough. It doesn't hurt to believe. So I said, I love him and I'll do anything if you'll make him live. I said very slowly, I'll give him up for ever, only let him be alive with a chance" (113).

The skeptical reader may well conclude that the resurrection of Bendrix was no miracle, and that God had nothing to do with it. A rational explanation would be that Bendrix had not died, but had merely been knocked unconscious; and that Sarah, out of fright and hysteria, had made a totally unnecessary vow. Indeed, Kathleen Nott dismisses the novel as "a book about sexual sin and about a superstitious bargain to evade punishment. The main 'answer' seems to be 'Catholicism is right for look what happened' (some of it very odd)."<sup>8</sup> But does Sarah "evade punishment?" It would seem, on the contrary, from the evidence of the diary, that she punishes herself, for in



giving up Bendrix she undoubtedly suffered. But Miss Nott is probably right in detecting a bias in the novel on behalf of Catholicism. This is a subject which will be taken up at another point in the discussion.

The answer to Miss Nott is that the book should be read according to its terms of reference. In terms of Catholic moral teaching, Sarah and Bendrix were engaged in a relationship which was sinful. Greene in this novel is attempting to explore the subject of love -- love of man and love of God. He finds, like Augustine, that the soul longs for the love of God, a love which is stronger, purer, and more meaningful than human love. Greene is also concerned with an examination of the role of suffering on the Christian believer; and as he had examined martyrdom in The Power and The Glory, he is writing now a novel which exemplifies the thesis that sanctity is possible even in the twentieth century.

Let us take up first, the question of sanctity. Other writers have attempted the difficult task of portraying this, notably Eliot in his portrayal of Celia Coplestone, the heroine of The Cocktail Party, who burdened with a sense of sin, goes off to a grotesque martyrdom at Kinkanja. Sanctity, according to Eliot,

requires faith --  
The kind of faith that issues from despair.

Bernanos, too, essayed the same topic in his Diary of A Country Priest; the priest before his death comes to a realization of the surreptitious workings of God's grace in the world. Mauriac has some very wise



remarks on the difficulties which will beset the novelist who attempts this difficult task. He avers:

if he [the novelist] tries to write a novel about sanctity he is no longer dealing purely with men, but with the action of god on men -- and this may be an extremely unwise thing to do. On this point it seems that the novelist will always be beaten by reality, by the saints who really have lived. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, the big and little St. Theresa and all the great mystics, are witnesses to a reality and an experience which is infinitely beyond the power of a novelist.<sup>9</sup>

Another problem, as Eliot also points out, is that modern man is more inclined "to accept damnation as poetic material than purgation or beatitude; less is involved that is strange to the modern mind."<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard also attests to the fact that sanctity is incomprehensible to the modern mind; and in his Training in Christianity and his Attack Upon Christendom, he enunciates what he calls the idea of offence: the offence of saintliness (sanctity is not understandable) and the offence of faith (faith is absurd).<sup>11</sup> These Kierkegaardian concepts are all the more significant, because Greene uses a third concept, that of the "leap," in this novel -- an idea which will be dealt with later.

First, to take up Mauriac's comments: it must be admitted, that the sanctity of Sarah is not quite believable. It is insisted upon, and three miracles are brought in to prove it, but it is not shown. Is is as though Greene realized the problem he was up against, and took the easy way out by killing off his heroine. The same criticism might well apply also to Eliot's Celia. Sanctity, after all, implies holiness in life, and this has to be portrayed: Sarah cannot



become a saint merely by ceasing to commit adultery. Greene allows her to take religious instruction from a priest, and both Parkis and his son Lance, are impressed by her indefinable quality of goodness, but is this enough? Sarah is at best a shadowy figure, and the reader never really gets to know her as he knows Bendrix. In the final analysis, therefore, we have merely Mr. Greene's word (through Bendrix) of the sanctity of his heroine.

Greene also faces an arduous task in trying to portray the action of grace. Mauriac's warning are again relevant; he comments:

Whenever a novelist has tried to recreate the way of grace, with all its struggles and its ultimate victory, he has left an impression of arbitrariness and misrepresentation. Nothing is more elusive in human life than the finger of God. It is not that it is not visible, but its imprint is so delicate that it disappears as soon as we try to capture it. God is inimitable, and He escapes the novelists' grasp. . . . The reason why most novelists have failed is their portrayal of saints who are sublime and angelic but not human, whereas their sole chance of success would have lain in concentrating on the wretched and human elements in their characters that sanctity allows to subsist.<sup>12</sup>

The last sentence is significant, and it almost seems that Greene has consciously followed Mauriac's advice: Greene has concentrated on "the wretched and human elements" in Sarah's character. Sarah knows only too well that she's "a bitch and a fake" (112). It is suggested in the novel that Bendrix was not her only lover, but that he was the latest in a succession of "affairs." Sarah also accuses herself of "lies and self-deceptions" (178).

The important thing to note in the novel is the quality of the divine love, which will admit of no other kind of love. The novel is a reworking of the idea set out in Augustine's Confessions: "Thou



hast created us for thyself, and our heart knows no rest, until it may repose in Thee."<sup>13</sup> This desire for God, argues Greene, is a basic human need; and it is postulated in the novel that love of God takes precedence over love of created things -- that nothing should get in the way of love between creator and created; a statement St. John of the Cross had earlier enunciated. St. John asserts that it is only when "all the powers, passions, affections, and desires of the sensual soul" are extinguished, that it "may attain to the spiritual union of the perfect love of God . . . unhindered by these affections -- now lulled and mortified . . . O how happy must the soul then be, when it can escape from the house of its sensuality!"<sup>14</sup> Union with God, St. John later goes on to say, "is attainable only by detachment from all created things and [by] sharp mortifications."<sup>15</sup> As Sarah notes in her diary, "already I want to abandon everything, everybody but you" (59).

The novel shows God allowing sin to exist, but it also shows God conferring grace. It shows that there can be good aspects to what would be considered grievously sinful; for the relationship between Sarah and Bendrix is not based exclusively on sex: had this been so Sarah would not have felt so deeply about Bendrix's death, but would merely have acquired a new lover. Her diary shows that she cares for Bendrix as a person, not merely as a sexual partner -- she asks God to "give [Bendrix] my peace -- he needs it more" (148).

Sarah might earlier have discounted the reality of God, but once having found Him and acquired faith, her conduct is consonant



with that of the believing Christian. She has made the "leap" into faith -- which is the first requirement for becoming a Christian, as Kierkegaard says -- and now lives on a level which Bendrix has not yet attained, but may in fact later arrive at. Objection has been made to the nature of Sarah's prayer, as she bargained with God. It is condemned as being non-Christian, because true prayer does not make demands upon God; instead, the petitioner is willing to accept whatever Divine Providence sees fit to bestow.<sup>16</sup> However, at this stage Sarah is deficient in true Christianity; and whatever doubts might be raised in regard to her prayer, Father Crompton's comments on the value of prayer are here pertinent. Father Crompton was the penitent Sarah's religious instructor, and he is pictured talking to Henry and Bendrix after Sarah's death:

"I'm afraid I've never been able to pray much," Henry said, "since I was a boy. I used to pray to get into the second XV."

"And did you?"

"I got into the third. I'm afraid that kind of prayer isn't much good, is it, father?"

"Any sort's better than none. It's a recognition of God's power anyway, and that's a kind of praise, I suppose." (216)

Sarah has made the "leap," but the quality of her faith is puzzling. She writes, for instance, "I believe there's a God -- I believe the whole bag of tricks, there's nothing I don't believe, they could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I'd believe. They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted and I'd believe just the same. I've caught belief like a disease. I've fallen into belief like I fell in love" (178).



Sarah's faith may best be interpreted in the terminology of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard insists that "faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off."<sup>17</sup> Jolivet points out that "faith is a leap into the absurd."<sup>18</sup> Kierkegaard depicts three stages in the life of the human being: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The aesthetic stage is the lowest of the three, and is marked by the individual's concentrating on pleasure, to the exclusion of everything else; the symbol for this type of sensual existence is Don Juan the Seducer. The early Sarah and Bendrix would fit into this category. The second stage, the ethical, is reached when the individual concerns himself with moral imperatives -- this would approximate to Sarah's giving up of Bendrix, and keeping her promise not to reopen the affair. The third stage, achieved by the "leap" of faith, plunges the individual into the highest of the three stages, the religious; and the hallmark of the religious stage is suffering. Sarah reaches this third stage, while Bendrix remains at the first, and will probably attain to the second and third also.

Sarah believes, like Tertullian, because it is absurd. "Faith always brings us face to face with the paradoxical and the absurd, and involves us in risking everything, like a man far out to sea, alone in a frail skiff with seventy thousand fathoms beneath him, miles and miles away from all human help,"<sup>19</sup> as Jolivet observes.

Faith, says Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling, involves sacrifice. He chronicles the sacrifice that Abraham, the man of faith, was willing to make (the killing of his son Isaac) at the bequest of



God. Similarly Sarah, unasked, gives up Bendrix, and the "ordinary corrupt human love" (149) which he could give, and which she longed for; since she realizes that "God it is who requires absolute love."<sup>20</sup>

What does Greene see as the relationship between sin and grace? And if, as Mauriac claims, "God is inimitable, and He escapes the novelist's grasp," how does Greene solve the problem of showing the action of grace? Mauriac himself provides the clue, when he comments that "grace has more contrivances than we know of."<sup>21</sup> Some of these "contrivances" deserve examination.

God is pictured in the novel as Sarah's other lover, who has eternity on His hands, and so can wait for Sarah and Bendrix to spend all their love on each other until there is nothing left. Sarah herself notes this fact in her diary, a document which throbs with the sincerity and passion of a person undergoing an intense religious experience: "You were there, teaching us to squander, like you taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You" (105). And Bendrix wryly notes that "he was as underhand as a lover, taking advantage of a passing mood, like a hero seducing us with his improbabilities and his legends" (213).

Given the different attitudes of Bendrix and Sarah to love, it is hinted in the novel that the affair was doomed to end. For Bendrix cannot conceive of love without jealousy: "I measured love by the extent of my jealousy and by that standard of course she could not love me at all" (61); "even in the moment of love, I was like a police officer gathering evidence of a crime that hadn't yet been committed"



(57); he tells Sarah, "anyone who loves is jealous" (63); and his jealousy causes him to be suspicious, to try and catch Sarah out in her lying, to pry -- as Parkis is later to do, urged on by Bendrix. Of Sarah, on the other hand, Bendrix ruefully notes, "she had so much more capacity for love than I had" (57).

In the end, Sarah makes the right choice, and sticks to it; Mauriac's personal reflections are again singularly appropriate here: "I knew what God's requirements were: His wish to be loved, and, what is much more important, His wish to be alone loved, or, at any rate, His desire that we should not love anybody except for Him and in Him. And this does not destroy human love; rather it makes it sublime."<sup>22</sup> This is exactly Sarah's view on the matter; for she tells Bendrix, "Love doesn't end. Just because we don't see each other" (79). She suffers because of her decision, but Christianity has always stressed the goodness of suffering, if undertaken in the right spirit -- "in suffering, the soul practises and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious."<sup>23</sup>

There are other "contrivances" utilised by the divine lover to keep Sarah's allegiance, and prevent the recrudescence of the affair.

After the meeting with Henry in January 1946, Bendrix returns home with him, and meets Sarah. Sarah has a bad cold, and Henry says to her, "You're wet through, Sarah. One day you'll catch your death of cold" (16). This is another example of dramatic irony, the reverberations of which are heard later in the novel; for after Bendrix learns of Sarah's rash vow from reading her diary, he attempts



to see her, but she escapes him by rushing out into the pouring rain. This leads on to her pneumonia and to her death, which brings down the final curtain on the affair.

A few days after that 1946 meeting with Henry, Sarah rings up Bendrix, asking him to lunch. They go to the restaurant they had frequented while they had been lovers. Sarah does not renew the relationship, as Bendrix had hoped, but talks about Henry. Bendrix, on saying goodbye, attempts to kiss her, but Sarah's abrupt coughing fit forestalls this (35).

After Sarah had given up Maurice, she reneges on her promise by attempting to take a new lover. This time she tries Dunstan, her husband Henry's chief. This attempt proves abortive; as she drearily chronicles in her diary, "it didn't work" (116). Six weeks after the vow, in an attempt to renew the relationship, she telephones Bendrix, who is away at the time (117-18). On another occasion, she follows Bendrix as he is on his way to the pub, but he never turns and sees her (137-38).

Sarah finally makes up her mind to go off with Bendrix, and packs a suitcase, leaving a note for Henry. Henry however comes home sad and depressed -- this was the day on which Bendrix had given him lunch at his club, and disclosed to Henry the fact that Sarah had been his mistress -- and Sarah's sense of responsibility to Henry makes her stay (139-43).

Unlike Rose Pemberton (The Living Room) who commits suicide when faced with the demands of religious orthodoxy that she give up



her human lover Michael Dennis, Sarah Miles takes the harder road of suffering. It later turns out that Sarah, who ends her life reconciled to God, had been baptized into the Roman Catholic Church, secretly, at the age of two. This is told to Bendrix at Sarah's funeral by her mother, Mrs. Bertram. (Father Crompton had urged that, in view of the fact that Sarah had been taking religious instruction from him, she should be buried with Catholic rites. Bendrix, however, persuades Henry to refuse, and to have a Golders Green cremation as had been planned). Mrs. Bertram tells Bendrix that Sarah had been a Catholic all along, "only she didn't know it" and that Henry should have "buried her properly" (201). Bendrix retorts, "You can't blame him if even Sarah didn't know." Mrs. Bertram replies, "I always had a wish that it would 'take.' Like vaccination." Later, when Bendrix tells this to Henry, the latter remarks, "It's an extraordinary coincidence, isn't it? Baptized at two years old, and then beginning to go back to what you can't even remember. . . . It's like an infection" (231). It is curious the relationship Mauriac's God and Mammon has to Greene's novel. In discussing the religion into which he had been baptized, Mauriac uses the same medical metaphor: "I was born into it; I did not choose it; this religion has been imposed on me from the day of my birth. Many others have been born in it and have swiftly escaped from it; because the inoculation of the Faith did not take on them."<sup>24</sup> Presumably Greene is trying to show the mysterious ways in which God works in the Roman Catholic Church, and it is this bias, coupled with the miracles, which may well have been what so deeply offended Miss



Nott. Indeed Greene's co-religionist, Evelyn Waugh, cautiously remarks that "One might even say that in places it [the novel] is too emphatically sectarian."<sup>25</sup> And Greene has been accused of employing "a material, almost mechanical, conception of grace" in this novel. "It would be difficult to conceive of grace in a more mechanical way. It is here applied, like one of the impersonal energies of nature, like a powerful drug or an electric shock, to an unconscious patient with a miraculous effect."<sup>26</sup> The only answer one can make to this charge is to acknowledge Greene's clumsiness in handling this, yet at the same time point out that grace by definition is irresistible and gratuitous. Greene may be awkward in depicting it, but his theology is impeccable. As Aquinas says, "grace is not acquired by acts, but by God's favor."<sup>27</sup>

A more valid objection can be made concerning the miracles; Greene, insisting on his heroine's sanctity, dutifully trots them out -- surely a work of supererogation, if ever there were one. It has been pointed out that the weakness of the novel lies precisely in these forced miracles -- "for we are not prepared for them by a sufficient portrayal of Sarah's saintly life. Her sacrifice -- great as it was, and her conversion -- deep as it was, aren't enough to give base to miraculous intervention."<sup>28</sup>

Why does Greene insist on Sarah's Catholic baptism? Do Catholics alone have a monopoly of working miracles? And are the three miracles sufficient proof of sanctity? The bias which Miss Nott sees is apparent.



The miracles themselves are insignificant. In the case of Parkis' son, Lance, the boy recovers from appendicitis after he has been brought in contact with one of Sarah's relics, a child's story book. Parkis had prayed to God and "asked Mrs. Miles . . . to do what she could do"; Lance recovers, and "told the doctor it was Mrs. Miles who came and took away the pain -- touching him on the right side of the stomach" (220).

The second miracle concerns the atheist Smythe. Sarah had been attracted to him because she had hoped that his arguments might disprove the existence of the God with whom she had made the pact; but instead of instilling disbelief, Smythe's arguments had the opposite effect, and contrariwise, Sarah seems to have converted Smythe to belief. He tells Bendrix, "When I heard she was dead, I prayed" (175); and later he confesses to having given up his rationalist talks on the Common, because he no longer "know[s] what to believe" (228). Smythe had a disfigurement on his otherwise handsome face -- a strawberry birth-mark, of which Sarah records in her diary: "I had an enormous wish to touch it with my hand, to comfort it with words of love as permanent as the wound" (128). On Sarah's death, Smythe guiltily cuts off a lock of her hair. It is not stated directly that the application of this relic to the disfigurement caused it to go away -- but Bendrix has a suspicion that this is what happened, although he takes refuge in the belief that the removal of the mark is nothing more than a coincidence.



Bendrix, finally, is a witness to the intercession of Sarah. He picks up Sylvia, mistress of the offensive critic Waterbury, purely for the sense of superiority this act gave him. He takes her with him to Sarah's funeral, then makes the discovery that he has no further desire to carry out his plans. He "implored Sarah, Get me out of it. I don't want to begin it all again and injure her" (195); and the implication is that Sarah did intervene, by sending the garrulous Mrs. Bertram to provide Bendrix with an excuse to politely get rid of Sylvia.

Finally, the effect of Sarah's sanctification on Bendrix himself must be mentioned. He muses that if Sarah could achieve the "leap," then it was possible for others to emulate her example: For if this God exists, I thought, and if even you -- with your lusts and your adulteries and the timid lies you used to tell -- can change like this, we could all be saints by leaping as you leapt, by shutting the eyes and leaping once and for all: if you are a saint, it's not so difficult to be a saint. It's something He can demand of any of us, leap. But I won't leap. (235-36)

You're a devil, God, by tempting us to leap. But I don't want Your peace and I don't want Your love. I wanted something very simple and very easy: I wanted Sarah for a lifetime and You took her away. With your great schemes You ruin our happiness like a harvester ruins a mouse's nest: I hate you, God, I hate You as though you existed. (236)

But Bendrix is no match for God in this struggle, and at the novel's end capitulates -- "O God, You've done enough, You've robbed me of enough, I'm too tired and old to learn love, leave me alone for ever" (237). The change in Bendrix can be documented by reference to the one or two simple acts of kindness he does for Henry in Book 5, illustrating the fact that the self-centered Bendrix is giving place



to a thoughtful, protective Bendrix. It is not a sudden change, of course; the "new" Bendrix gains in plausibility when it is remembered that there was some good in him -- the scar on his shoulder, for instance, was the result of an injury caused by his protecting another man from a falling wall (131); and when in the restaurant he embarrasses the detective Parkis, causing him to spill his drink, Bendrix is immediately sorry, and reflects on "what a cruel thing it is to humiliate a father in the presence of his son" (32).

At the end of this novel, the reader has to answer two questions which will inevitably occur to him. Can novels be written about saints? And does Greene's novel seem plausible? The answer to the first is that obviously novels can be written about any subject whatever, depending on the novelist. To answer the second requires more thought -- the novel is plausible because an unbeliever tells the story: his skepticism makes the events he relates seem all the more credible, and saves the novel from becoming the "pious tract" that Walter Allen asserts it is. But, at the same time, the heroine Sarah is more shadow than substance, and the miraculous elements seem overdone.



## CHAPTER VIII

### OF MEN AND MORALS: THE QUIET AMERICAN

Novelists of the "great tradition" in English Literature, according to F.R. Leavis, are those who possess the quality of "intense moral interest" and "a marked moral intensity."<sup>1</sup> Novelists of this tradition, says Leavis, are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Dr. Leavis also includes D.H. Lawrence because Lawrence wrote "from the depth of religious experience."<sup>2</sup> Graham Greene likewise, approves of Fielding because he finds in him a "moral seriousness."<sup>3</sup> Greene's The Quiet American is a novel centered around moral issues; it "is primarily about human beings involved in an ethical dilemma."<sup>4</sup> The quality of moral preoccupation has been a characteristic of all Greene's work, though this moral view was filtered through a Roman Catholic consciousness, and the moral vision tended also to be obviously apparent because of the author's tendency to schematize: indeed, as a religious writer he could hardly refrain from schematizing. Devoid of the Roman Catholic frame of reference, The Quiet American explores the kind of morality which insists that any means, however dubious, are justified if the end sought is a "good" one. Greene thus is a member, if a minor one, of



this "great tradition" in the English novel.

Nathan Scott remarks that Greene has "extended the range of his performance as a novelist by undertaking for the first time to write within the genre of the political novel."<sup>5</sup> But Barbara Seward pointedly shows that the typical Greene interests are present in this novel -- "For what Greene has actually done is to simplify his material by removing from it most traces of explicit Catholicism. The familiar obsessions -- good and evil, death, pain, violence, pity, and innocence -- still form the novel's emotional focus; the familiar protagonist -- Greene's seedy, sensitive individual trapped in an impossible moral dilemma -- still carries the novel's theme."<sup>6</sup>

Critics who see it solely as a political novel are guilty of misreading the book. One political scientist, for instance, dismisses it as a piece of obvious political propaganda by Greene, the purpose of which is to discredit American policy in Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> Another writer infers from the novel that Greene is "passionately, indignantly and unfairly anti-American."<sup>8</sup> It is true that America is caricatured in the novel -- Americans have their "private stores of Coca-Cola and their portable hospitals and their not quite latest guns"<sup>9</sup> -- but this does not mean that Greene is for the Communists or for Thomas Fowler.

It is not Greene's anti-Americanism that is present in the book, but Fowler's. And Fowler has good reason to hate America and Americans; his hatred is the result of Alden Pyle's taking his mistress Phuong, away from him -- "it was as though she were being taken away from me by a nation rather than a man" (155). Again, Greene's



technique of irony is misunderstood by those who accuse him of anti-Americanism; for Greene does not sympathise with Fowler either -- Fowler is "a prime example of the obtuse narrator: the storyteller who offers his experiences without fully understanding them, while at the same time providing the less obtuse reader with the complete evidence."<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Fowler, the narrator, is a correspondent in Saigon for his English newspaper, covering the war between the French and the Vietminh. The time is the early fifties, when the United States was beginning to intervene in the conflict with aid to the French. The background to the novel is this war, but in the forefront are the ethical issues which both Pyle and Fowler have to confront. Fowler is the Englishman who has gone to seed in Saigon; his happiest moments are spent with his opium pipe, his next happiest are spent with surfeiting his sexual appetites on Phuong, his beautiful Annamite mistress. Jaded, disillusioned, cynical, the monotonously flat tenor of Fowler's existence is broken by the irruption of Alden Pyle, the thirty-two-year-old, Harvard-educated employee in the United States Economic Aid Mission.

The time-scheme of the novel is as convoluted as that of The End of The Affair. It opens with the death of Pyle, and through the reminiscences of Fowler, the mystery of Pyle and the mystery surrounding his death are elucidated. The main concern of the novel is the reversal of the Jamesian Ur-situation, where "the innocent American confronts the wicked European in a dilemma involving material,



worldly goods, and moral values. The wicked European invariably wins away the worldly goods from the American, but just as invariably the innocent American triumphs in a moral sense over the corruption of the European, which has been revealed to him."<sup>11</sup> Pyle is innocent in the typical Greene sense of "ignorant"; and, as Fowler remarks, "God save us always from the innocent and the good" (13). More than that, he is an ignorant idealist, a combination that, coupled with the power he possesses as an American, causes the death of at least fifty Vietnamese civilians, and would doubtless have caused more had he not been stopped. Fowler, on the other hand, is experienced and indifferent, although he can be moved into action when his interests are threatened. Between the jaded cynic and the wicked idealist, there is little to choose.

The title of the novel suggests three layers of meaning. Pyle is "quiet," first of all, in the sense that he is quite dead. Fowler looks at him on a mortuary slab and reflects that "he looked more than ever out of place. I saw him in a family snapshot album, riding on a dude ranch, bathing on Long Island, photographed with his colleagues in some apartment on the twenty-third floor. He belonged to the skyscraper and the express elevator, the ice-cream and the dry Martinis, milk at lunch, and chicken sandwiches on the Merchant limited" (14). Pyle is also quiet, in Phuong's sense of the term -- serious, unassuming, gentle, not at all boisterous like the American journalist Grainger. And, finally, Pyle is quiet in the sense that he is devious -- and hence, dangerous.



Pyle, intent and serious, had a great respect for the political commentator, York Harding, who on the strength of a short tour of South-East Asia, had written that what was needed in the area was a Third Force. Pyle, ostensibly a minor diplomat, is in reality concerned with the setting up of this Third Force, which would be neither French nor Communist; and he finds as its leader, the brigand General Thé. Pyle, who sees everything in simplistic terms -- one is either a "Red menace" or a "soldier of democracy," as Fowler puts it -- provides General Thé with plastic bombs. Thé plants the bombs on the route which a military procession was due to take; the procession was called off, but the bombs stayed put, destroying when they exploded, innocent civilian lives. This episode has a bearing on one of the two epigraphs appended to the novel, the grimly ironic comment from Byron

This is the patent age of new inventions  
For killing bodies and for saving souls,  
All propagated with the best intentions.

For Pyle, of course, does act from good intentions; Fowler vouches for his sincerity -- "I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused" (61); and later, he comments that Pyle "was impregnably armoured by his good intentions and his ignorance" (182).

Pyle, armoured with good intentions, neglects to think about the consequences of his actions; or rather (unlike Beckett), he is tempted to do the (morally) wrong thing for the right (according to his private philosophy) reason. His attitude to the deaths he caused



is enlightening: "They died in the right cause," he remarks, and "In a way you could say they died for democracy" (200). Faced with the results of his intervention, Fowler comments that Pyle "looked white and beaten and ready to faint, and I thought, 'What's the good? he'll always be innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity'" (182). Confronted with the evidence of blood from one of the dead Vietnamese on his shoes, Pyle is so devoid of moral feeling that his only comment is that he must get them cleaned before he calls on the Minister.

Apart from the theme of innocence versus experience (or idealism versus cynicism), there is another dominating theme, that of existential engagement. Professor Evans sees Greene as toying with existentialism in this novel, and says that this is a trend which is apparent also in Brighton Rock, The Heart of The Matter, and The End of The Affair. Evans points out that the novel can be interpreted in terms of Sartre's existentialist ethic, and proceeds to do so, although he admits that Sartre's brand of existentialism is atheistic, and that Greene would be unlikely to espouse atheistic existentialism.<sup>12</sup> Now Greene (or Fowler) does use the word engage several times in the novel: but the book is existentialist only by virtue of the fact that all human beings are committed to some choice, and even not to choose implies some degree of selectivity.

Existentialism, as it operates in The Quiet American, can be



seen in relationship not only to Sartre's brand, but to the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard. "When Kierkegaard speaks of a truly existing individual," writes Hector Hawton, "he refers to the state of mind of a man who has passed into the religious stage, staked all on the truth of Christianity, and undergone the experience of repentance and encounter with God. For an atheistic existentialist like Sartre, to be truly existing means to be committed, engage, but naturally the central commitment for him is not the choice of a Christian life."<sup>13</sup> Now Fowler readily admits that he has no religious beliefs; he tells the Roman Catholic priest at Phat Diem, "I'm not a Roman Catholic. I don't think you could even call me Christian" (48). But after the death of Pyle, he is sorry for his collusion in the murder, and longs for "someone to whom I could say I was sorry" (211). He is not yet existing in the Kierkegaardian sense, but the longing is there, coupled with remorse. Perhaps, in spiritual matters, Fowler is more involved than he will admit.

Fowler stresses again and again that he is not engage:

"I'm not involved. Not involved," I repeated. It had been an article of my creed. The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I preferred the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw: I took no action -- even an opinion is a kind of action." (23)

And Fowler castigates Pyle because "he was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved" (27). However, "the powerful emotional appeal of Existentialism lies in the doctrine of engagement. Every human being is committed, engage. But here again, if you cannot help being



committed, surely the pertinent question is not whether to be neutral or no (this is impossible) but whether the cause to which you dedicate yourself is a worthy one."<sup>14</sup> Which raises the questions: Is Pyle's cause worthy? Is the French cause just? Is the intervention of the Americans morally justifiable? And what about Fowler -- to what is he committed? Greene's norm of commitment, by which the others may be judged, is that of the priest at Phat Diem. He makes a very brief appearance in the novel, reading his breviary, providing sanctuary in the Cathedral precincts for the "Catholics, Buddhists, pagans" who "believed, whatever their religion, that here they would be safe. While we watched, a young man with a rifle in Vietnamese uniform pushed his way through: he was stopped by a priest, who took his rifle from him. The father at my side said in explanation, 'We are neutral here. This is God's territory'" (47). His soutane "speckled with blood," the priest acts as surgeon in the hospital run by the nuns. This standard of Christian commitment provides a norm which the others fall short of.

The overtly committed in the novel are the Americans and the French (the colonial powers), and opposing them are the Vietnamese. Fowler insists to Pyle; to Vigot, the chief of the *Sûreté*; and to the flyer Trouin, that he is not involved. His protestations are like a musical motif, recurring time and time again within the novel. Just as the first epigraph employed by Greene referred to the dangerous practices of Pyle, the second epigraph he selects can be applied to Fowler:



I do not like being moved; for the will is  
excited; and action  
Is a most dangerous thing; I tremble for  
something factitious,  
Some malpractice of heart and illegitimate  
process;  
We're so prone to these things, with our  
terrible notions of duty.

But Fowler's asseverations of non-involvement are countered by Pyle's "There's something you must believe in. Nobody can go on living without some belief" (100); by Trouin's "We all get involved in a moment of emotion and then we cannot get out. War and Love -- they have always been compared" (169); and by Heng the Communist's statement, "Sooner or later, one has to take sides. If one is to remain human" (194).

When Vigot, the police chief who reads Pascal and suspects Fowler of being implicated in the death of Pyle, tells Fowler: "You don't follow your own principles . . . You're engagé, like the rest of us" (152), he speaks more truly than he knows. For the extent of Fowler's engagement is four-fold. He fights to retain Phuong from Pyle. Pyle is young, virile, and eligible; Fowler is ageing, disillusioned, and has a wife who refuses to divorce him. When Fowler lies that he is getting a divorce, and Pyle rebukes him for the unseemly action, Fowler merely retorts, "This is European duplicity, Pyle. We have to make up for our lack of supplies" (145). In the fight over Phuong, one notices allegorical overtones -- the old world and the new battling over the Third World. Phuong is an opportunist; she is willing to go with Pyle (he represents skyscrapers, the Statue



of Liberty, legal marriage) yet when he is dead, she comes back to Fowler. In terms of the political allegory, Phuong represents the realism of the Asians; her name signifies Phoenix, the bird that rises from the ashes, and thus, presumably, she symbolizes the eventual position of the Asians in the conflict.

The commitment of Fowler to Phuong is for purely selfish purposes: she provides his evening opium pipe, and sex when he wants it. But Fowler's second commitment is purely altruistic. He shows himself as an engageé, when he reflects on the bombing incident, and the dead bodies of the Vietnamese littering the street -- "But what I remembered was the torso in the Square, the baby in its mother's lap. . . . A two-hundred-pound bomb does not discriminate. How many dead colonels justify a child's or a trishaw driver's death when you are building a national democratic front?" (182). Fowler's third commitment is in co-operating with Heng the Communist, who sets the trap for Pyle. This commitment is the result of a mixture of selfish reasons (with Pyle out of the way, Phuong will come back) and a moral conscience which has been outraged by Pyle's callous lack of sympathy for the deaths he had caused. Finally, Fowler betrays his avowed status of a degagé by preventing Pyle from shooting two Vietnamese. The scene takes place in a watch tower where Fowler and Pyle have been stranded, after attending a Caodaist festival, when their car ran out of gas --

The two men watched us -- I write men, but I doubt whether they had accumulated forty years between them. "And these?" Pyle asked, and he added with a shocking directness, "Shall I shoot them?" Perhaps he wanted to try the sten.



"They've done nothing."  
"They were going to hand us over."  
"Why not?" I said. "We've no business here. It's their country." (115)

For Fowler, in the last analysis, is a moralist. He may, like Ivan Karamazov, refuse to believe in God; but unlike Ivan, he does not agree that if God does not exist, all is permitted. He makes a moral protest (compounded, it is true, of part selfishness) against Pyle's casual killings, and reminds the reader that "innocence is like a dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm" (34) but dangerous if not ruthlessly checked.



## CHAPTER IX

TO SUFFER IS TO BE:

A BURNT-OUT CASE

The genesis of A Burnt-Out Case is to be found in Greene's Congo Journal, published with Convoy to West Africa under the title In Search of A Character. Greene notes that the journals "may have some interest as an indication of the kind of raw material a novelist accumulates. He goes through life discarding more than he retains, but the points he notes are what he considers of creative interest at the moment of occurrence."<sup>1</sup> These journals serve the same function as The Lawless Roads, from which The Power and The Glory was later to emerge; with the added dimension, however, of showing Greene's pre-occupation with the craft of the novelist -- how to create character; what constitutes a good opening; and how the story should be told. His protagonist, Querry, presented him with some difficulty -- "all I know about the story I am planning is that a man 'turns up,' and . . . the place where he emerges into my consciousness is a leper station, many hundred miles up the Congo."<sup>2</sup>

Greene's Congo Journal depicts life as it was lived at the leper hospital of Dr. Lechat at Yonda. Undoubtedly this had a bearing on his decision to set the novel in a leproserie, and his notes on leprosy indicate the significance of the novel's title -- "Leprosy



cases whose disease has been arrested and cured only after the loss of fingers or toes are known as burnt-out cases. This is the parallel I have been seeking between my character X and the lepers. Psychologically and morally he has been burnt-out. Is it at that point that the cure is effected?"<sup>3</sup>

The journal also shows Greene trying to sketch out plausible characters. The doctor in his rough sketch, who later becomes Dr. Colin of the leproserie, was early given the role of the jealous husband who kills X. This idea was given up; yet, Greene, remarks, "I feel that X must die because an element of insoluble mystery in his character has to remain."<sup>4</sup> The remaining problem which worried Greene was point of view.

Through whose eyes shall I tell my story? It cannot be through X's, though I can imagine certain letters from women -- condemnatory letters which perhaps in one of his rages he shows the priest. I don't think it can be through the priest's eyes -- I wouldn't know this father and his daily routine well enough; I am suspicious of several points of view, except in so far as, like the letters and the dialogue, they are 'contained' in the story. There remains the author's 'I,' but then he should not penetrate into the thoughts of any character -- which must be indicated only in action and dialogue. This makes for the mood of mystery which I want to catch. Title? possibly 'The Uncompleted Dossier.' If the priest keeps a dossier on X, it will enable us to penetrate a little into his mind. The one who must never put up a case for himself is X.<sup>5</sup>

In the novel, the focus of the narrative is on X (who becomes Querry), but the narration is third person dramatic. Greene describes his characters and the setting in which they are placed, and recounts information about them. Querry is used as a third-person centre of consciousness: in short, it is a dramatic or camera-eye



presentation, and the dividing up of the novel into six parts, with a total of thirty-four sections or scenes, adds to the impression of a camera at work. Greene's protagonist is Querry, and the name has symbolic overtones which relate it to the enigma Greene wanted his character to be. Querry (query=question mark) suggests a mystery or an ambiguity to be solved. The Africans on the boat wonder about Querry -- "Here is a white man who is neither a father nor a doctor. . . . He comes from a long way away -- we do not know from where -- and he tells no one to what place he is going nor why."<sup>6</sup> Querry also suggests doubt, a key word which is perhaps the shaping word in today's culture. Querry is an architect, famous for his constructions; but he is now bored with his art, and the adulation heaped upon him by the world. He is bored with sexual conquests, which come too easy to him; and bored too, with religion -- he is a lapsed Catholic. Weighed down with a monumental acidie, he decides to get away from it all, and stops at the Congo mission station simply because "the boat goes no further" (17). It is at this mission station that he accomplishes acts of kindness and of love, emerges from his moral isolation, and then ironically dies at the hands of a jealously demented French colon, who suspects him of sexual improprieties with his wife. Thus Greene underscores the absurd ironies of life.

The way to an interpretation of the novel is provided by Greene himself, in the dedicatory letter to Dr. Michel Lechat: "This is not a roman à clef, but an attempt to give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief, and non-belief, in the kind



of setting, removed from world-politics and household preoccupations, where such differences are felt acutely and find expression."

The exponents of the types of belief listed by Greene can be schematically laid out: Belief -- this is Christianity, the exponents of which are the Roman Catholic missionary priests and nuns, and the lay Catholic inhabitants of the colony. Lost belief may best be represented by Querry himself, and half-belief by the African converts who pay divided allegiance to the Christian god as well as to their own pagan divinities. Non-belief is represented by the atheist Dr. Colin and by the journalist Parkinson, though there is a difference between the two men. Colin has rejected God because of an intellectual conviction; the corrupt Parkinson of the many jowls and the slanted journalism, a representative of Greene's detested "chromium world," is simply unaware of any religious values at all -- and as such he and Ida Arnold would make boon companions.

Querry's first contact with the mission priests takes place on the voyage up the Congo. The setting and atmosphere of the voyage is imaginatively given: the discomfort is insisted upon, the heat, humidity, lack of air, the mosquitoes and the flies. The priest-captain as he reads his breviary provides a strong contrast with his bored passenger -- "The captain read his breviary with a fly-whisk in his hand, and whenever he made a kill he held up the tiny corpse for the passenger's inspection, saying 'tsetse' -- it was nearly the limit of their communication, for neither spoke the other's language



with ease or accuracy" (4). The last sentence is capable not only of a literal interpretation, but a figurative. For Querry symbolically does not speak the language of the priest; the priest (the man of faith) is distinguished from Querry (the man without faith). The only thing they share is the heat and their common humanity. The non-participation of Querry in the religious action is also shown -- he does not attend mass when the priest celebrates; the captain reads his breviary or busies himself making rosaries, while Querry, the ex-Roman Catholic, lies inert, the flickering candles bringing with them memories "of the Benedictions of his youth" (5).

When a stop is made at an African seminary, Querry is irritated at the behaviour of the priests there. "He was vexed by the pleasure which they took in small things . . . Those who marry God, he thought, can become domesticated too . . . This marriage like the world's marriages was held together by habits and tastes shared in common between God and themselves -- it was God's taste to be worshipped and their taste to worship, but only at stated hours like a suburban embrace on a Saturday night" (9-10). The laughter of the priests and the spontaneity of the Africans are things which Querry cannot share; to him, "laughter was like the unknown syllables of an enemy tongue" (11).

Querry's other contact with priests comes when the boat arrives at the leproserie, and he stays on at the mission. These men are more involved with the task of making human lives more comfortable



than with matters of dogma and doctrine, or the morality of the people under their care. "The fathers were unconcerned with private lives. A husband, after he had been cured, left the leproserie and his wife moved into the hut of another man, but the fathers asked no questions" (154); they "were too busy to bother themselves with what the Church considered sin (moral theology was the subject they were least concerned with)" (155). Father Joseph looks after the chicken houses, and supervises the building of the new hospital; Father Paul and Brother Philippe are in charge of the dynamo; Father Thomas super-intends the two schools; and Father Jean, who "had once been a brilliant moral theologian before he joined the order and now . . . carefully nurtured the character of a film-fan, as though it would help him to wipe out an ugly past" (105), dreams of air-conditioning in the rooms of the new hospital.

Greene's response to these men (Father Thomas excluded) is obviously one of approval, since the only criticism of them is put in the mouth of a totally unsympathetic character, the odious Rycker, who finds them "an unsatisfactory lot" and complains that "they are more interested in electricity and building than in questions of faith" (44). The priests talk about turbines when Rycker, the failed semi-narian, wants to discuss with them the requirements of a Christian marriage. The only priest at the leproserie to be more interested in men's faith than in their physical well-being is Father Thomas, who seems to be failing in his ministry. Father Thomas "was the only priest in the leproserie with whom the Superior felt ill at ease; he



still seemed to carry with him the strains and anxieties of the seminary. . . . he [Father Thomas] was ill at ease with men who had grown up and were more concerned over the problems of the electric light plant or the quality of the brickmaking than over the pursuit of souls" (104-105).

Father Thomas, like a child, is afraid of the dark; and the physical description given of him is unflattering -- "Father Thomas, with eyes sunk like stones in the pale clay of his face, swallowed his coffee in a hurry, like a nauseating medicine" (26). It is Father Thomas, together with Rycker, who pry into Querry's background and his motives, not paying attention to the Superior's warning -- "I don't look for motives" (109). Father Thomas deliberately misconstrues Querry's detachment, and sees him as a saint who has been given "the grace of aridity . . . walking in the footsteps of St John of the Cross, the noche oscura" (116). Of all the priests at the leproserie, Father Thomas is the only one to hysterically denounce Querry, when later he is accused unjustly of seducing Marie Rycker; he thus goes from one extreme to the other, with no certain proof either way.

Rycker the ex-seminarian, also shares some of the characteristics of Father Thomas. The physical description given of him is even more unflattering than that of Father Thomas. He was "tall, stooping, and overgrown. He was like the kind of plant people put in bathrooms, reared on humidity, shooting too high. He had a small black moustache like a smear of city soot and his face was narrow



and flat and endless, like an illustration of the law that two parallel lines never meet" (36). Rycker's oily hypocrisy is symbolised by his being the manager of a palm-oil factory. Rycker, like Father Thomas, deliberately misunderstands Querry, preferring to think of him as "the greatest thing to happen in Africa since Schweitzer" (75).

The representatives of half-belief are the native Africans, who are pulled by Christianity on the one hand, and by the pagan Nzambi cult on the other. Even when converted, they understand Christianity but imperfectly, and the passengers on the boat taking Querry up the Congo regard the priest-captain as "the great fetishist." They rely upon charms and upon "native medicines." Pendele is their holy place, and Querry's "boy," the mutilated leper Deo Gratias, goes in search of it. Querry, too, is in search of his mythical Pendele, and questions Deo Gratias about it; but all he can get from the man is a confusing account of a place with a waterfall, where "Nous étions heureux" (95). Some natives also embrace the cult of Simon; Dr. Colin explains to Querry: "He died in gaol nearly twenty years ago. They think he'll rise again. It's a strange Christianity we have here, but I wonder whether the Apostles would find it as difficult to recognise as the collected works of Thomas Aquinas" (68).

Following Greene's schematization, one type of unbelief is represented by the gross journalist Parkinson. "There is a strong allurement in corruption and there was no doubt of Parkinson's; he carried it on the surface of his skin like phosphorous, impossible to



mistake. Virtue had died long ago within that mountain of flesh for lack of air" (138). Querry becomes the typical Greene "hunted man" as Parkinson pursues him for a story which the sensation-hungry readers of his tabloid can exclaim over. Like Father Thomas and Rycker, Parkinson is determined to see Querry as a saint, and refuses to write the real truth, since this would hardly create a sensation.

Another type of unbelief is that represented by Dr. Colin, who "had long ago, before he had come to this continent of misery and heat, lost faith in any god that a priest would have recognised" (17). And yet Colin, with the priests, works to alleviate pain -- "the doctor was a less easy character to understand. Unlike the fathers he had no belief in a god to support him in his hard vocation" (155). Thus, he closely resembles Dr. Rieux in Camus' The Plague, whose philosophy was that if he believed in a God, he would have left the cure of his patients to Him. Colin is justified, if not through faith, at least through works. Typically, like Dr. Rieux, he displays the Camusian virtues of modesty and anti-heroics; just as Rieux matter-of-factly fights the plague, Colin fights leprosy. An exchange between himself and the Superior is significant:

"Your god must feel a bit disappointed," Doctor Colin said, "when he looks at this world of his."

"When you were a boy they can't have taught you theology very well. God cannot feel disappointment of pain."

"Perhaps that's why I don't care to believe in him." (256)

The important thing to note here is that the Superior does not answer Colin's argument, but evades it. And by evading it, he justifies the status quo, just as Paneloux's theology justified the plague



as punishment on sinful man. Colin measures a man, not by his faith, but by his virtues; creeds to him have "the flavour of higher mathematics" (168), and he modestly goes about his self-imposed task of treating leprosy, with the only hope that he will be buried beside his wife in her unmarked grave in the leproserie cemetery.

Querry is an example of lost belief and lost vocation. The importance of vocation is stressed in the novel; the priests have this sense of vocation which Querry lacks. Colin, for instance, admires Father Joseph, of whom he says: "He's a good bricklayer. He's putting one brick on another for the love of God like they used to build monasteries" (57). Querry, on the contrary, realizes that he lacks this vocation, when he writes in his journal, "What I have built, I have always built for myself, not for the glory of God or the pleasure of a purchaser" (58).

Querry is very much concerned with his lack of faith. He confides in Dr. Colin about the matter, and in the hotel bedroom in Luc he spends the whole night baring his conscience to Marie Rycker. From being one who "proved that the King existed by historical, philosophical and etymological methods" (199), as he tells Marie in the tedious and coy fable which occupies most of Part 5, he grew to disbelieve. "Only in moments of superstition I remember that I gave up the sacrament before I gave up the belief and the priests would say there was a connection. Rejecting grace Rycker would say" (247), he tells Dr. Colin. And again, to Marie he admits that "this total



vacancy might be punishment for the rules [I] had wilfully broken" (204).

Querry reminds the alert reader of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus. Stephen rejected the Church, and turned to art. Querry rejects art (architecture) and the Church, but retains a vague nostalgia for the latter. Both Stephen and Querry reject the Church, but cannot escape it. Cranly, for instance, tells Stephen: "It is a curious thing . . . how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve."<sup>7</sup> And Colin tells Querry, "You're too troubled by your lack of faith, Querry. You keep on fingering it like a sore you want to get rid of. I am content with the myth; you are not -- you have to believe or disbelieve" (247); and again, Colin observes, "You must have had a lot of belief once to miss it the way you do" (247).

Querry, who declared to the Superior, "I want nothing" and "I suffer from nothing. I no longer know what suffering is" (12), paradoxically suffers from his lack of faith; as he later admits to Colin, "I want peace as much as you do" (29). The theme of suffering is present, in muted form, in the novel. The lepers suffer physically, and Dr. Colin tries to alleviate their pain with paraffin wax; Querry suffers internally, racked with the prick of conscience; but it is left to him to find his own cure. His sardonic parody, written in his journal at the novel's beginning, "I feel discomfort, therefore I am alive" (3), is put, peculiarly enough, into a Christian perspective by the atheistic Colin:

Wouldn't you rather suffer than feel discomfort? Discomfort irritates our ego like a mosquito-bite. We become aware of ourselves, the more



uncomfortable we are, but suffering is quite a different matter. Sometimes I think the search for suffering and the remembrance of suffering are the only means we have to put ourselves in touch with the whole human condition. With suffering we become part of the Christian myth. (157)

That Querry was on the way to being cured is attested by what may seem to be two relatively insignificant acts. Querry, who had earlier "detest[ed] laughter like a bad smell" and to whom it was "like the unknown syllables of an enemy tongue," is shown laughing twice in the novel; the first time in a joke with Colin, the second time, just before he dies, in ironic awareness of life's surprises. The other important incident takes place in Part 2 of the novel, and it concerns Querry's showing compassion and love to the leper Deo Gratias. Deo Gratias had set out to look for the mythical Pendele, and had lost himself in the forest. Querry goes after the man, and spends the long African night comforting and protecting him. This act gains in greater significance when placed alongside the Superior's sermon in Part 4; the Superior imputes true Christianity to those who are technically non-Christians, if they do some good: for impulses to good deeds come from God.

It is ironic that as Querry is on the right road to discovery, he is killed by Rycker because of the machinations of his child-wife Marie; his death becomes doubly ironic when it is recalled that Querry caused the death by suicide, of another Marie, his ex-mistress. This Marie, the innocent child terrified by moths, provides retribution for the countless other women Querry had betrayed.

Another irony is provided by the fact that the killing is done



by Rycker, a thoroughly detestable man, a hypocrite who tries to discuss "Christian marriage" with Querry, but who sees marriage merely in the Pauline sense -- lust sanctified by a Church ceremony. Marie is to be forgiven, in some measure, for her lies to the nuns that Querry was the father of her baby -- the lie provides an excuse to escape the loathsome attentions of her odious husband. The corrupt Parkinson shrewdly gets to the root of Rycker's problem: "'I think he wants to believe the worst. It makes him Querry's equal, don't you see, when they fight over the same girl.' He added with a somewhat surprising insight, 'He can't bear not being important -- '" (243-44).

Father Thomas sees Querry first as a saint, ignoring the Superior's advice, "Don't let's recognise them before the Church does. We shall be saved a lot of disappointment that way" (110); but he is also the first to see Querry as a betrayer of trust and seducer of women. Rycker, whom Querry dubs a "pious imbecile," sees him as the Querry, famous architect and potential Catholic answer to the Protestant Scheitzer. But the final comment is given by one of the mission priests -- "He was an ambiguous man" (252).

Frank Kermode says the theme of the novel is that of heroic virtue,<sup>8</sup> but in this he is probably misled by the unstable Father Thomas, who tells Rycker that Querry was suffering from aridity, and sees him in terms of a practitioner of heroic virtue. Heroic virtue is defined by Benedict XIV as the performance of "virtuous actions with uncommon promptitude, ease and pleasure, from supernatural motives



and without human reasoning, with self-abnegation and full control over natural inclinations."<sup>9</sup> In the case of Querry, the commission of a single act (the rescue of Deo Gratias) is hardly enough to make him a practitioner of heroic virtue. Querry may be suffering from aridity, though hardly in the sense that Father Thomas sees it. For Querry's is no "dark night" sent by God; the aridity he suffers comes from another cause, his sensuality, his acidie, his habitual sin. The suggestion at the novel's end, however, is that he is bored with this type of existence, and is ready for a change. In this respect, he can be compared with Maurice Bendrix -- both are ripe for the "leap," though Bendrix protests he will not "leap," and Querry dies before the leap can be accomplished. Both Bendrix and Querry, in Kierkegaard's terms, are aesthetic men. Querry admits his conquests of women (Kierkegaard uses Don Juan as the prototype of the aesthetic man) and confesses to Parkinson, "It was only a question of time before I realised that I didn't love at all. I've never really loved. I'd only accepted love. And then the worst boredom settled in. Because I had deceived myself with women I had deceived myself with work too" (142). But Querry goes on to the second stage, the ethical, which Kierkegaard characterises by friendship and vocation. Querry forms a friendship with Colin. He asks Colin, "Can you cure me?" (52); and he agrees to help Colin build his hospital, thus putting his noted architectural talents to some good use, and acquiring a sense of vocation as he does so. Querry had earlier pointed out the difference between himself and



the medieval builder -- "He worked with love not vanity -- and with belief too, I suppose" (143) -- and Querry himself, the last we see of him, is coming around to the medieval builder's point of view.

Berdyaev insists that true Christianity means suffering. "Christianity gives meaning to suffering and makes it endurable,"<sup>10</sup> because in suffering, opportunities are provided to show love and compassion. Querry, the moral leper, shows compassionate behaviour to Deo Gratias, the physical leper. And left to himself, Querry may well have found that peace which he told Colin he so longed for.



## CHAPTER X

### SEX, SIN, SUICIDE: THE PLAYS

Greene believes that "the theatre . . . is an art of discussion, a fact which Dryden's plays illustrate as well as Shaw's."<sup>1</sup> As if observing his own dictum, Greene's two plays examined in this chapter abound in dialectic rather than in action. Shaw concentrated in his plays on probing analyses of society -- in Mrs Warren's Profession, for example, he dealt with prostitution; in Widower's Houses with slum landlords; and in Major Barbara, he explored the problem of "tainted" money. Similarly, Greene explores in The Potting Shed, the role of faith in life; and in The Living Room, the Catholic attitude to sin, in this case the sin of fornication. In both plays, suicide as a means of escaping life's problems is dealt with.

As in The End of The Affair, Greene's Potting Shed deals with the intervention of God into human affairs, and also emphasises the fact that miracles can and do happen. As in The Power and The Glory, tensions are generated by depicting two opposing points of view -- the conflict between faith and atheism.

The play opens in the drawing room of Wild Grove, home of H.C. Callifer, staunch rationalist and the author of spirited books and essays debunking Christianity. Callifer lies dying upstairs, and



his family have all gathered to mourn his passing -- all save his younger son James, a journalist, about whom there hangs a mystery. In an attempt to clear up the mystery, Henry Callifer's granddaughter Anne sends a telegram to James in Nottingham, inviting him down. James arrives, but his mother Mrs Callifer, resolutely refuses to let him see his dying father.

There is something odd about James -- he can remember no event in his life before his fourteenth birthday. His marriage to Sarah has ended in divorce: he had failed her as a husband, though he had treated her in a kind enough fashion. He confesses to not knowing what love is, is consulting a psychiatrist, and has some deep-rooted though unexplained, fear of the potting shed at the bottom of the garden.

Anne assumes the role of detective and solves the mystery. It appears that James had hanged himself in the potting shed at the age of fourteen, in despair at ever reconciling the atheistic and rational principles of his father, with the faith of the Roman Catholic Church as taught him by his uncle William Callifer, a convert and a priest. The mystery of the potting shed is cleared up by Mrs Potter, widow of Callifer's gardener, who had found James hanging and had cut him down. According to the testimony of Potter, James had died; but when Father Callifer prayed over the body of his nephew, a miracle had occurred and James was restored to life.

With the miracle of the potting shed explained, James becomes a new man, no longer in need of a psychiatrist, and with his malaise cured -- though it is not apparent, from the play, why this should be



so. His faith in God and in love are reasserted, and he offers to remarry Sarah. Mrs Callifer, who had earlier believed in the miracle, but had denied it had ever happened in order to protect her husband, now thaws towards her son, and seems to be admitting the possibility that there is room for faith in human life. This is a summary of the play, which is interesting from a theological point of view, but unsatisfactory as drama. The play hinges on one of those contracts so beloved by Greene, in this case a bargain between Father Callifer and God, in exchange for the miracle; and the effects of the miracle, if there was a miracle, on Father Callifer and his faith. Father Callifer, perhaps paraphrasing the text of John 15:12 ("There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends"), begs God to restore James to life, and offers his faith in exchange. This, in effect, is tantamount to damning himself; since, as St Thomas teaches, faith is "the foundation of the spiritual life,"<sup>2</sup> and as Paul warns in Hebrews 11:6, faith is necessary for salvation: "Without faith it is impossible to please God; for anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who search for him."

Father Callifer's contract therefore involves a contradiction: would God take away an individual's faith, when it is by faith alone that one is saved? What therefore is one to think of Greene's God, who in this play deprives a person of his only means of salvation? Secondly, is it possible that a priest would make such an offer? Would not the absurdity and enormity of his act come home to him?

A close examination of the text of the play is necessary,



since some critics assert that Father Callifer never offered up his faith, and consequently never lost it. In Act II, Scene 2, Father Callifer says he had forgotten the actual words he had used in his bargaining: "I even forgot what I said to Him, until you came," he tells James. "He answered my prayer, didn't He? He took my offer."<sup>3</sup> The reader will assume, therefore, that what James remembers of the incident is substantially correct, since Father Callifer does not contradict him:

Callifer: I'd have given my life for you -- but what could I do? I could only pray. I suppose I offered something in return. Something I valued -- not spirits. I really thought I loved God in those days. I said -- I said, "Let him live, God. I love him. Let him live. I will give you anything if you will let him live." But what had I got to give Him? I was a poor man. I said, "Take away what I love most. Take -- take --" (He can't remember)

James: "Take away my faith but let him live?"

Callifer: Did you hear me?

James: Yes. (95)

It seems clear, then, that the faith-life bargain has been made, since Callifer himself does not deny it. But viewed in the light of Catholic theology, such a contract is patently monstrous. The play shows that God had accepted the offer, since Father William Callifer's subsequent life is marked by a pronounced lack of faith. But if God did accept Callifer's offer, then He would have been involved in a curious and confusing situation. An attempt has been made to extricate the playwright from a morass of his own devising; McLaughlin confidently asserts that Callifer never really lost his faith --

What then, did God do which resulted, by His permissive will, in the degradation of Callifer's sacerdotal life? Again, this is hypothesis: God deprived him, at the instant of the miracle, of sensible devotion,



those feelings or sensations of interior sweetness -- exultation, buoyancy, dilation of heart, euphoria, tenderness, the flush of fervor -- which the senses often experience when the soul is in union with God, when it is living the life of faith. God is free to do this, as we see from the lives of mystics, to purge the soul of those affections, oftentimes selfish, which retard its progress toward total abandonment. But it is a trial by fire, a colorless aridity, "a long litany on a wet day."<sup>4</sup> The soul must live by an unalloyed faith, by a stark committal.<sup>4</sup>

There are two critical objections to McLaughlin's thesis; the first and most obvious is that McLaughlin himself admits that his suggestion is hypothesis only; arrived at by external means, since nowhere in the play is there any textual evidence to support it.

McLaughlin further goes on to suggest that Father Callifer could not have lost his faith, since it is impossible for a cleric to go on with his ecclesiastical duties unless motivated by faith. This is an obtuse suggestion; logic alone tells us that it is obvious a priest could go through the motions of carrying out his sacred duties, even if devoid of faith and without having the intention of conveying sacramental graces. That this is possible, we have the affirmation of the Council of Florence, which solemnly warns that for a sacrament to be valid, the minister of the sacrament must at least have the general intention of doing what the Church intends.<sup>5</sup> As a look at the text of the play will show, his housekeeper's speeches indicate that Father Callifer has lost his faith, and that his parishioners know it; the following exchange, in Act II, Scene 2, is highly significant:

Miss Connolly: I'm going to have my say first. Here they want a priest with the faith in him. Don't turn away and pretend you don't understand.



Callifer: I say Mass every Sunday at eight-thirty and on weekdays at seven for those who care to come. There aren't many of them. What else do you want of me?

Miss Connolly: Oh, you stand at the altar all right, gabbling your way through as quickly as possible to get at your breakfast. But you don't believe a word you are saying.

Callifer: How do you know?

Miss Connolly: In a life like mine you get an ear for such things.

Callifer: Yes, I suppose so. (84)

It is to be noted that Callifer does not deny his housekeeper's charges that he has lost his faith. When she again observes, "The people here have a right to a priest with the faith" (85), Callifer does not contradict her for implying that he lacks faith. Indeed, Callifer himself confesses, "I had a brother who believed in nothing, and for thirty years now I have believed in nothing too. I used to pray, I used to love what you call God, and then my eyes were opened -- to nothing" (86). Other comments made by Callifer reinforce the point that he is a priest without faith:

I do my job. Nobody can deny I do my job. Look at the pictures, the books. I keep up appearances, don't I? (89)

It's a difficult thing, practising a faith, day in, day out, when you don't believe one jot of it. (90)

If God existed, why should He take away His faith from me? I've served Him well. I go on serving Him. (92)

Another ingenious attempt to extricate the playwright from his cul-de-sac is provided by Wassmer, who substantially makes the same point which McLaughlin so artfully put forward: that Callifer never really lost his faith, but "offered what he loved most and at the moment of that offering it was not clear in his mind what he did love most. This would explain his hesitation when he recalls the



occasion, or rather in fact when he does not recall it, because it is James who puts the words in the priest's mouth some twenty [sic] years later."<sup>6</sup>

McLaughlin also suggests that Father Callifer may be going through a period of aridity, or "dark night of the soul," presumably basing his theory on a remark made by the priest, "The saints have their dark nights, but not for thirty years. They have moments when they remember what it felt like to believe" (92-93). Aridity is defined as "the absence of consolation in prayer."<sup>7</sup> St John of the Cross, in defining the "dark night," says that this is a time of "spiritual purgation wherein the soul is purified and detached in the spirit, and which subdues and disposes it for union with God in love."<sup>8</sup> Such souls are "abandoned to dryness so great that they have no more any joy or sweetness in their spiritual exercises, as they had before; and in their place they find nothing but insipidity and bitterness."<sup>9</sup> But St John also makes a distinction as to the genesis of aridity; it can also come "from weakness or lukewarmness, from some physical derangement or bodily indisposition."<sup>10</sup> If one concedes that Callifer, in addition to being an alcoholic, is an unstable neurotic, then Callifer is suffering a "dark night," but not in the sense McLaughlin intended. Also, according to St John of the Cross, the purpose of the "dark night" is to increase faith, not to decrease it or to take it away; for in the latter case, God would be defeating his own ends.



McLaughlin's theory rests on the highly untenable grounds that Callifer offered the consolations of his faith, and not the faith itself. The theory crumbles, as pointed out, because there is no textual evidence to support it. Secondly, the dark night, if sent by God, increases faith; and Callifer is shown as having, by his own admission, no faith at all. To bolster up his pro-Callifer sentiments, McLaughlin cites Exodus 32:32, where, after the Israelites have lapsed into sin, Moses declares to God, "If thou wilt forgive them, forgive. But if not, blot out my name, I pray, from thy book which thou hast written." This is an equivalent of Greene's favourite bargain of damnation; for Moses in effect is saying that if the Israelites are not going to be saved, then he would not wish to be saved either.

McLaughlin also cites Romans 9:3, where Paul declares, "For I could even pray to be outcast from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my natural kinsfolk." Now, if this were possible, it would show the degree to which a person would be capable of love. But as Father Murphy points out,<sup>11</sup> salvation is not a commodity to be negotiated; and it is up to each individual Christian to seek his salvation first and foremost. In the mouth of a priest, therefore, such a bargain would not only be obtuse, but would show a glaring lack of theological acumen. For the members of the Church, especially its priests, should pray for faith to increase, not for its decrease or cessation. To pray for the absence of faith, furthermore, would be going against logic. It is plausible that in a moment of crises, an individual would turn to any means, however impossible; but it is difficult to



see God conniving at confusion.

It may be profitable at this stage to examine what should be the role of faith in life. Faith is a virtue; it is a gift of God, "hence it is for man to treasure and preserve it."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, "a Catholic can never have a just reason for abandoning the faith that he has once embraced."<sup>13</sup> The gift of grace is added by God so that faith can be kept. If faith, then, is so important to the Christian, no true Christian would want it taken away from him; and second, God would never take away the true Christian's gift of faith. As St Augustine observes, "God does not abandon us until we first abandon Him."<sup>14</sup>

The reader is faced with an improbable priest and an impossible situation. The priest has lost his faith -- but who took it? Catholic teaching would assure us that it was not God. But, according to Greene's play, the bargain was made with God, and the outcome was the miracle of the resurrection of James and the concomitant loss of Callifer's faith.

St Thomas Aquinas teaches that miracles can only be performed by God's agency; he defines a miracle by quoting Augustine, to the effect that "where God does anything against that order of nature which we know and are accustomed to observe, we call it a miracle."<sup>15</sup> St Thomas also declares that a miracle is worked by faith, and that the end product of a miracle is the increase of faith: "The working of miracles is ascribed to faith for two reasons. First, because it is directed to the confirmation of faith; secondly, because it



proceeds from God's omnipotence on which faith relies. . . . the grace of miracles is necessary that people may be confirmed in their faith."<sup>16</sup>

But what was the result of Father Callifer's miracle? A loss of faith, on his part; continued skepticism from his family; and an indefinable malaise in his nephew. As Sarah complains, "It would have been such a useless miracle. It ruined us. It gave you thirty empty years, and your uncle . . ." (115). We know what happened to the uncle: he became a whiskey priest, administering sacraments he didn't believe in. And Henry Callifer goes to his grave as confirmed as ever in his atheism, although the foundations of his principles might have been shaken a little -- as Mrs Callifer admits, "All his life he'd written on the necessity for proof. . . . And then proof was pushed under his nose, at the bottom of his own garden. . . . I saw his face. We always knew each other's thoughts. I could hear him saying to himself, 'Must I recall all those books and start again?'" (112)

The simplest explanation would be, of course, that James never died, and there was no miracle. But James did die: we have the evidence of Potter. And that a miracle did take place, we have the evidence of Father William Callifer, and also the rest of the Callifers, who object to a miracle in the family just as other families might have objected to a murder.

Greene tries to explain exactly what happens in his play to the bewildered reader or theatre-goer:



Discussing the religious issues in The Potting Shed, Greene explains that the priest's offer to give up his faith in return for his young nephew's life is "a contract made in the dark." When the boy lives, the priest only imagines that God has accepted his offer. But faith is "a gift from God, not a merit, and therefore was not his to give away," as is proved when he recovers faith. Greene admits that his point may not be too clear but adds that if his play were all crystal clear, it would be a "dull thing indeed."<sup>17</sup>

A number of things must be noted in connection with that statement.

First: if what goes on in a play or a novel cannot be understood by the reader, unless a key has to be supplied by the author to unlock the mystery, then that play or novel is artistically a very poor thing.

Second: the "explanation" explains nothing. Greene is right theologically when he asserts that faith is a gift from God. But this is not the point at issue, which is this: if Callifer lost his faith (and the word "recover" in the statement above, adds conclusive authorial proof that he did lose it), then who took it? Third: the relationship between the faith-miracle-potting shed imbroglio is not clarified. And clarity in an author hardly makes his work "a dull thing."

The problem with this play is that Greene has once more involved himself in a piece of theological daring, and in so doing has left himself out on a limb. He has pushed paradox too far, with the result that we are left, not with profundity, but with confusion and error. As Father Murphy complains,

Greene's dramatic statement is theologically and psychologically false. It is psychologically false because it is difficult to understand how a good priest (and at the time of the suicide, Greene's presupposition is that Father Callifer is a good priest in love with his faith) could so forget the logic of his theological knowledge and pastoral experience as to ask by faith for what faith cannot possibly



give. The miracle of The Potting Shed is theologically false because it insinuates that God connives with sin and inconsistency.<sup>18</sup>

Greene is hoist with his own theological petard. He might have solved his problem, and given a better explanation, had he made a distinction in this play between "faith" and "belief." The two are usually taken to be synonymous, but in a short story, "A Visit to Morin,"<sup>19</sup> Greene makes the distinction (insofar as I can take his meaning) that faith is the blind, intuitive assent of the individual, in spite of what might seem to be inconsistencies or absurdities; belief, on the other hand, Greene (or Morin?) equates with the codified system of arguments that then come into existence to bolster up faith. Morin, for instance, knows that God exists, and has faith in Him; but finds the scholastic arguments for the existence of a deity to be inadequate. Morin has lost his belief -- he has voluntarily ex-communicated himself by living with a mistress and by cutting himself off from the sacraments. He has cut himself off from the channels of grace, and, as the priests said it would, his belief has withered away. Paradoxically, because he has lost his belief, he has realized that the Church is right -- "I know the reason why I don't believe and the reason is -- the Church is true and what she taught me is true. For twenty years I have been without the sacraments and I can see the effect."<sup>20</sup> He is caught by his faith, even though he does not believe the teachings of that faith. Morin declares, "As long as I keep away from the sacraments, my lack of belief is an argument for the Church. But if I returned and they failed me, then I would really be a man without faith, who had better hide himself quickly in the grave so as



not to encourage others."<sup>21</sup>

If this subtle distinction between faith and belief had operated in The Potting Shed, and Father Callifer had shown as losing his belief, but not his faith, then on Greene's (or Morin's?) terms, the play would have been theologically defensible. But Callifer's prayer shows faith, not belief, operating.

The titles of the two plays contain a rather obvious ironic symbolism. A potting shed is a place where a gardener's tools are kept, but more importantly, it is also a place where young plants are nourished and protected from hostile environmental conditions, until they are strong enough to be transplanted. Greene tries to show in The Potting Shed that the chill blast of Henry Callifer's rationalism is destructive to James Callifer, since it stunts the latter's spiritual growth.

The Living Room, similarly, contains an ironic pun. It is shown as a place, not of living, but denial of living. Life is lived between four constricting walls, love is absent, and the desperate heroine has no other alternative but to kill herself. The play opens with the twenty-year-old Rose Pemberton, an orphan, arriving at the home of her great-aunts, Teresa and Helen, and of her great-uncle, Father James Browne. Her mother has recently died, and she is accompanied by Michael Dennis, the forty-five-year-old executor of her mother's will. It is soon disclosed that Michael and Rose slept together on the night of her mother's funeral. Michael, married to a



neurotic wife, begins an affair with the naive Rose. The tough-minded Aunt Helen discovers this, and stops Rose from leaving by manipulating Teresa, the weaker sister, into believing that she is seriously ill. Rose remains, since Teresa needs her; meanwhile, she continues to meet Michael in a hotel room several afternoons a week. Aunt Helen knows of these assignations, because she has set the cook to spy on Rose; but she allows them to continue because she has hopes that Rose will later be suitably contrite and seek absolution.

A crisis is precipitated when Mrs Dennis calls on Rose and hysterically asks her to leave Michael alone. Mrs Dennis pretends to be about to take an overdose of pills; Rose knocks them away from her, and they roll unnoticed onto the floor. For the first time since she began the affair with Michael, Rose has been forced to think seriously about the fact that Michael is a married man, with duties and obligations to his wife. She realizes that she is in an impasse -- if she goes away with Michael, his wife will be unhappy; if she stays away from Michael, then she will be unhappy. Unable to bear her own suffering or another's, Rose retrieves Mrs Dennis's neglected pills, takes a dose and kills herself.

The situation and characters give the impression of over-manipulation by the author, rather reminiscent of the authorial contrivances in The Heart of The Matter. Rose is manoeuvred into an impossible situation, and then Greene takes the easiest possible way out, by providing a final solution to that situation. Rose really never had a chance.



Greene provides a stage direction, at the beginning of the play, that there is "something strange about the living room."<sup>22</sup> It is on the third floor, with a bathroom opening directly from it -- obviously it was once a bedroom. As there was a mystery about the potting shed, so too is there a mystery about the living room. It appears that the two sisters, out of a neurotic fear of death, have closed off all the rooms in which someone has died, with the result that their living space is confined to the erstwhile bedroom. Aunt Helen is a potential termagant and reminds us of Mauriac's Brigitte Pian, who cloaks a self-righteousness under a veneer of Catholic piety; Aunt Teresa's behaviour is odd, as she avoids unpleasantness by walking past people and pretending to herself that they do not exist. Father Browne, their brother, is a Roman Catholic priest who has been in an accident which has left him crippled and confined to a Bath chair. Into this situation -- an unhealthy atmosphere, with characters crippled either physically or psychologically -- comes Rose, described as "bewildered" and with "a look of being not quite awake."<sup>23</sup> The play deals with the Catholic attitude to marriage and fornication. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament; that it is, as St Paul declares, a remedy for lust; and that the marriage bond is indissoluble while either partner still lives, since marriage symbolically typifies the union of Christ with the Church.<sup>24</sup> A series of oppositions is built up in the play, the dialectic revolving around clashes between the priest-uncle and Rose,



and between the priest and Michael Dennis. Father Browne remonstrates with Rose, and gives the view of the Church to support his statements: "How can you have a love affair without trouble?" (32) For Rose is sinning against God and at the same time hurting Mrs Dennis. Rose is also guilty of not facing up to facts, and of evading responsibility, when she declares to Michael Dennis (Act I, Scene 2 ): "I don't want to think" (40); and "Don't make me think. I warned you not to make me think. I don't know about things. They'll all get at me if they have a chance" (40-41). Only when she is confronted with Mrs Dennis does she realize that wives have legitimate claims upon their husbands.

Michael Dennis, older than Rose and therefore more culpable, also evades his obligations to his wife, another of Greene's neurotic and unappealing women, reminiscent of Mrs Scobie or Mrs Fellows. A rather heavy-handed irony is also implicit in the situation in which Michael finds himself -- the psychologist unable to solve his own emotional problems. In the confrontation between Father Browne and Michael Dennis is the conflict between faith and science, or Roman Catholicism versus Freud and Jung. The problem is that the positions are ultimately irreconcilable, and no via media is provided in the play. Indeed, it is doubtful if any middle ground could be possible, since the Church which Father Browne relies upon has all the answers, which Michael Dennis as the apostle of the new science refuses to acknowledge. In the end, however, neither Catholicism nor psychology saves



Rose. She confesses to Father Browne: "I'm a coward. I cannot bear too much pain" (58). In addition to being naive, Rose is shown as not having enough spiritual reserves to draw on in moments of stress. Father James' solution is that she try prayer, saying the rosary, and attending mass. Father James, perhaps having in mind the Biblical injunction, "How good it is for me to have been punished, to school me in thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71), suggests to Rose: "In a case like yours we always have to choose between suffering our own pain or suffering other people's. We can't not suffer" (68-69).

Rose makes a fruitless appeal to Teresa, and dies with a prayer upon her lips. This is an obvious attempt on Greene's part to elicit sympathy for his heroine, whose innocence and naivete are supposed to provide extenuating circumstances for her action -- indeed, Father James keeps on calling her a child, and suggests another extenuating factor: the lack of love in the household. James remarks with asperity to Helen, "Don't blame him [Michael Dennis]. Blame our dead goodness. Holy books, holy pictures, a subscription to the Altar Society. Do you think, if she had come into a house where there was love, she wouldn't have hesitated, thought twice, talked to us --" (54).



## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion shows that Greene believes "that man's existence has a meaning only with reference to a transcendental deity."<sup>1</sup> Examined from this point of view, it was seen that Greene's fiction and non-fiction imply a Christian world view. The four "Catholic novels" occurred between 1938 and 1951, and were "Catholic" in the sense that they could be meaningfully interpreted from the standpoint of Roman Catholic theology. Two later novels, A Burnt-Out Case and The Quiet American, are Christian in tone, but not explicitly Catholic. They can be interpreted from the standpoint of Christian existentialism. In The Comedians, Greene no longer concentrates on the religious problems of his characters. The interest is now on trust and commitment.

The plays examined in Chapter X were included because of their theological interest. Greene is not a good playwright; the plays are obviously the by-product of a novelist who is trying his hand at another fictional mode. The descriptive passages at which Greene excels, can find no part in a play, which depends heavily on dialogue, character, and action. Greene is not good at dialogue, and the action of the two plays is static.

In Chapter I, some of the pitfalls surrounding the writer



who attempts to deal with the divine in the secular art form of the novel, were given. This concluding chapter is concerned with finding out if Greene avoids these pitfalls, and with a further disquisition on the duties of the Catholic novelist, as he tries to reconcile faith and fiction.

A problem which arises in Greene's works, and is especially important in a discussion of the two plays considered in the preceding chapter, is the attitude of the Catholic writer in his depiction of sin and sinners -- a subject touched briefly in Chapter I.

Of importance here is Greene's obsession with suicide, and his depiction of it in several novels and in two plays. In the very first novel, The Man Within, Andrews on the last page is contemplating suicide; and this pattern is repeated in The Heart of The Matter, where there are two suicides, that of Major Scobie and that of young Dick Pemberton. Rose Pemberton and James Callifer both kill themselves. Maurice Bendrix, Helen Rolt and Rose Brown all consider suicide. This presents a problem: as pointed out in Chapter I, Cardinal Newman assures us that it is impossible to have a literature free of sin; but to what extent may the Catholic author depict what to him, must be grievous sins? Also, and following on from this, is the Catholic author bound to show his disapproval of sinful acts which are committed by his characters? Finally, are his characters to be shown as aware that they are committing sins?



Like Melville's Bartleby, Greene apparently sees suicide as the ultimate in withdrawal from life. Obviously suicide is an obsessional neurosis deeply buried in Greene's psyche, and not yet laid to rest, as is attested by a novel as recent as The Comedians; where the Catholic Marcel, the lover of Brown's mother, hangs himself after she dies. Hesla notes that suicide, for Greene's characters, is "the only possible means of escape from a world in which being human means that one must drink the cup of suffering."<sup>2</sup> Greene is apparently using the suicide device in his fiction to exorcise a childhood trauma, when he attempted to kill himself because of boredom (see Chapter II). Pope Pius XII chides that "the personality of the author, his life and his tendencies, are not to be the starting point of the critical study; but rather his work itself and what it expresses."<sup>3</sup> Few critics will disagree with that statement; and in view of this injunction, therefore, further speculation on Greene the man may well be irrelevant, and except for mentioning the fact of the obsession, what now remains is to look at his treatment of this obsession in his fiction.

How does Greene view suicide? There are two methods for discovering this: by what Greene says himself, and by what we can discover in his work. The latter is the more important method, since, as Pope Pius also warns, "one wishing to know the mind of the author must attend to his words; unless there is real doubt about the words, they are to be taken as natural witnesses to the inward soul."<sup>4</sup> In discussing his attitude to suicide with Henry Hewes,



Greene made a useful distinction:

"Of course," replies Mr Greene, "suicide is a mortal sin. But who is to say that a person committing suicide is in a state of mortal sin just because he dies without having confessed his mortal sin?"<sup>5</sup>

In The Living Room, Father Browne enunciates this view in speaking of Rose's death. In Act II, Scene 3, he says, "Nobody claims to know what she thought at the end. Only God was with her at the end"<sup>6</sup> (77). But it can be objected that nowhere in this play has Greene deplored the act of suicide; indeed, he even goes so far as to elicit our sympathy for the erring Rose, by implying that she had no other alternative. Father Murphy complains that in The Heart of The Matter and The Living Room, "the dramatic theme repeats itself -- suicide as the nihilistic solution to a frustrating situation. But in contriving this effect and evoking a commensurate compassion for his suicides, Greene seems to lose his sense of perspective and proportion in relation to the circumstances and characters conspiring to his effect."<sup>6</sup>

What Maritain has to say on the responsibilities of the writer who depicts sin is informative. He declares: "The essential question is not to know whether a novelist can or cannot depict such-and-such an aspect of evil. The essential question is from what altitude he depicts it and whether his art and mind are pure enough and strong enough to depict it without connivance. The more deeply the modern novel probes human misery, the more does it require super-human virtues in the novelist . . ."<sup>7</sup> Does Greene connive with sin? In the case of Rose Pemberton, I would say he does, for the reason given above. In the case of Major Scobie, Greene makes it clear that



the character and actions of Scobie are morally bad; however, Greene had to explain, exterior to the novel, the real truth about Scobie. There is no condemnation of Dickie Pemberton's suicide, neither of James Callifer's. True, Pemberton is not a Catholic, but if suicide is a sin, then presumably it is a sin for both Catholic and non-Catholic alike. True also, James Callifer was only a youth when he killed himself; but this is really no excuse, since James had already reached the age of reason, that time when, according to the teachings of the Church, an individual is able to distinguish between good and evil.

Greene, as a Catholic writer, has an obligation to show that sin, precisely because it is so attractive, hinders man from coming to God. He must, if he is to be true to his vocation as a Catholic writer, teach without appearing to preach. But there is, on the contrary, an element in Greene's work that is disturbing. He seems to be extraordinarily fond of creating a sensation; the damnation bargain with God is a case in point. Apart from its dubious suitability, several variations on this theme lose any freshness or vigour it might have had. The shock technique of getting the reader involved quickly decreases, since the now bemused and blasé reader might justly retort, "For I have read it all already, known it all" -- to paraphrase Eliot.

Furthermore, in his attempt to show that the validity of the sacraments does not depend upon the moral life of the priest, Greene in novel after novel has drawn a clerical stereotype: seedy priests;



unholy priests; useless priests; anxious, guilt-ridden priests; priests with failing vocations; and priests given over to a spirituous, rather than spiritual, life. He seems unable to draw a priest happy and contented in his vocation. One may even make the suggestion that it is a curiously perverted form of spiritual pride to keep insisting on how sinful or inadequate or incompetent the Roman priesthood is. We are also presented with priests who, despite rigorous training in the theological niceties, nevertheless are guilty of muddled thinking. In The Power and the Glory, for instance, the whiskey priest reflects: "But at the centre of his own faith there always stood the convincing mystery -- that we are made in God's image -- God was the parent, but He was also the policeman, the criminal, the priest, the maniac and the judge. Something resembling God dangled from the gibbet or went into odd attitudes before the bullets in a prison yard or contorted itself like a camel in the attitude of sex."<sup>8</sup> This is an untheological speculation, improbable in a priest. The phrase that man is made in the image of God is to be taken metaphorically, not literally, since God is spirit, not body. Second, the phrase surely means that man is capable of growing to be like God in holiness and perfection. Etienne Gilson explains that since God is the source of man's being, "everything bears the stamp of the source whence it has received its being."<sup>9</sup> He goes on: "The image of God can be deformed within us by sin and may have to be re-formed there by grace, but it cannot be lost; it is not necessarily an actual participation of God by the soul but the ever-present possibility of this participation."<sup>10</sup>



The sometimes tedious, self-consciously Catholic "Catholicity" of Graham Greene riles perceptive critics like Mary McCarthy, who complains that Greene is titillating the public with a "new pornography." She complains, reasonably enough, that "nearly every one of Mr Greene's works features a 'daring' notion, verging on blasphemy but redeemed by a sententious piety that seems to leave it to God to judge whether Mr Greene is not, after all, a better Catholic than the Pope."<sup>11</sup> She concludes: "If Graham Greene's works, in the aggregate, are tiresome, for all their gift of suspense, and 'leave a bad taste in the mouth,' this does not detract from their appeal, for pornography has always been tiresome, while catering to an appetite for novelty; it cannot escape this fate."<sup>12</sup>

Mention has already been made of George Orwell's commonsense attack upon the cult of the sanctified sinner. For the moral danger inherent in this, the comments of a theologian are revealing. Dietrich von Hildebrand notes what he calls Greene's "protective indulgence toward the sinner."<sup>13</sup> (Greene himself is of the opinion that his characters, however much they try, never sin against God.<sup>14</sup> Now this is a remarkably naive assertion, since as Mauriac dryly remarks, all sin is a sin against God).<sup>15</sup> Von Hildebrand holds Greene to be guilty of sin mysticism, because of his "glorification of the sinner." Von Hildebrand sees it as morally dangerous when "the sinner assumes the role of the hero."<sup>16</sup> Greene's attitude seems to be that his sinners merit God's mercy. This may well be so: but, as St Augustine warns, one should not make "of God's mercy a safe-conduct



to sin."<sup>17</sup>

Greene, in the four novels singled out for special discussion, left the fate of his characters in doubt. He left Pinkie Brown and Major Scobie's judgment to God, rather than heavy-handedly telling the reader of their final resting-places. It is all the more puzzling, then that Greene (having stressed the mercy of God and the fact that human beings are in no position to judge) should later declare, "I wrote a book about a man who goes to hell -- Brighton Rock -- another about a man who goes to heaven -- The Power and the Glory. Now I've simply written one about a man who goes to purgatory [i.e., The Heart of the Matter]."<sup>18</sup> This pat summation, this awarding of heaven or hell, seems to destroy totally the saving ambiguity of the novels.

Greene's paradoxes on occasion break down. In Brighton Rock, the contrast he makes between right and wrong, good and evil does not stand up to close scrutiny. A comment, made in a general way about Greene's theologizing, is particularly appropriate to this novel. Father Connolly comments that Greene's theologizing "exist[s] at times apart from the natural process of the plot and realistic characterization."<sup>19</sup> This statement is valid also as a commentary on The Heart of The Matter. Both Brighton Rock and The Heart of The Matter contain serious implausibilities, because Greene has used them as vehicles for an untenable thesis -- that the sinner, merely because he is a sinner, is deserving of serious consideration.

Greene's ambiguity sometimes degenerates into obfuscation, as



in The Potting Shed. In the other play, The Living Room, the dialogue creaks, the situation is clichéd (the middle-aged lover's seduction of the innocent young thing), and there are inconsistencies in characterization. A conventional, convent-bred girl goes to bed with her lover on the night of her mother's funeral, and we are asked to accept this as consistent; it is possible, but highly improbable, that the convent-educated Rose would so quickly lose all of the values instilled into her by the nuns.

Greene is sometimes guilty of misunderstanding Catholic teaching, as in the short story, "Special Duties."<sup>20</sup> In this story, Mr Ferraro, a hard-headed businessman with one eye on the pence and the other on heaven, assigns his private secretary to collect indulgences for him -- this is her special duty. Over a period of three years, the wispy Miss Saunders collects a total of 36,892 days. But her employer, on checking up on her, finds her in sexual dalliance when she should have been collecting indulgences. Shaken, he wonders if any of the indulgences claimed to have been collected were genuine: had Miss Saunders been with her lover on all the occasions she was supposedly out indulgence-hunting? The irony of the story is, of course, that the man who tries to secure himself a niche in heaven is outwitted by the mousy secretary. The irony goes deeper -- Mr Ferraro does not profit from his experience: he merely resolves to dismiss Miss Saunders and engage a new secretary for these "special duties."

The irony notwithstanding, the whole foundation of the story



is undermined by the fact that no living person can collect indulgences on behalf of another living person.<sup>21</sup> Either Greene did not bother to check canon law for the facts, or he has created an implausible character in Mr Ferraro. For Mr Ferraro would have checked and double-checked, and would have known that his secretary could not have gained a single indulgence on his behalf.

Greene seems also guilty of affecting literary poses. The boredom, the thirst for new sensations, the preoccupation with seediness -- all contrive to give a somewhat decadent air to his work.<sup>22</sup> In Journey Without Maps, Greene presents an incredibly romantic attitude to Africa. The "seediness" of Africa is made more appealing than the "cerebration" of civilization.

Greene also tries to dignify what is really nothing more than a jaundiced outlook on life. The result is never the whole story, but a selectivity of certain facts. In The Lawless Roads, Greene comments on the difficulty a writer has in describing his surroundings: "How to describe a city? Even for an old inhabitant it is impossible; one can present only a simplified plan, taking a house here, a park there as symbols of the whole."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in writing about life, Greene presents "only a simplified plan"; and this, consistently done, amounts to distortion, and falsification on a grand scale. The result is that in novel after novel, the reader meets Graham Greene and his obsessional neuroses.

Greene's work also, tends to be repetitive. He rings the changes on the same novel time and time again. The same character



appears in book after book; Louise Scobie of The Heart of The Matter is Mrs Fellows (The Power and The Glory) transported to West Africa. Father Browne, of The Living Room, could be Father Rank of The Heart of The Matter. Pinkie, of Brighton Rock, is an adolescent version of Raven (A Gun For Sale). Coral Musker (Stamboul Train) shares her pathos with Helen Rolt (The Heart of The Matter) and Else (The Confidential Agent).

Since I am more concerned with what Greene has to say rather than with how he says it, the main concern of this thesis has been content rather than form, the latter being treated only incidentally. Extended discussion of Greene's ability as a story-teller, the narrative pace, the excitement, the filmic quality of most of his work has deliberately been avoided.



## FOOTNOTES

### CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 388.

<sup>2</sup>Eliot, On Poetry and Poets, 130.

<sup>3</sup>Greene, Collected Essays, 41-53.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 108-09.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>7</sup>Dante, "Letter to Can Grande Della Scala." In Alan Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, 202.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Reinhardt, The Theological Novel of Modern Europe, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas Hanna, "What Does One Mean by 'Religious Literature'?", In George Panichas, ed., Mansions of The Spirit, 81.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Osterman, "Interview With Graham Greene," 360.

<sup>12</sup>Greene, Why Do I Write?, 32.

<sup>13</sup>Morton D. Zabel, Craft and Character in Modern Fiction, 289.

<sup>14</sup>Why Do I Write?, 47.

<sup>15</sup>Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, 177.

<sup>16</sup>Eliot, "The Rock." In Selected Poems, 116.

<sup>17</sup>Becker, The Heavenly City, 14.

<sup>18</sup>Eliot, Selected Essays, 398.



<sup>19</sup>O'Connor, 33.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>21</sup>John Henry Newman, The Idea of A University, 229.

<sup>22</sup>Zabel, 291.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith, 1.

<sup>24</sup>O'Connor, 146.

<sup>25</sup>Pope Pius XII, "On Literary Criticism," 535; 534.

<sup>26</sup>Harry J. Mooney and Thomas F. Staley, eds., The Shapeless God, IX.

<sup>27</sup>Greene, In Search of A Character, 26.

<sup>28</sup>Sister Mariella Gable, This is Catholic Fiction, 12.

<sup>29</sup>Barbara Nauer Folk, "Fiction: A Problem for the Catholic Writer," 105.

<sup>30</sup>Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Newman, 296.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 314.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>34</sup>Neville Braybrooke, "Catholics and the Novel," 28.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Josephine Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," 139.

<sup>37</sup>O'Connor, 185.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 196-97.

<sup>39</sup>Waugh, Robbery Under Law, 206.

<sup>40</sup>Becker, 17.



## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Greene, Why Do I Write?, 30.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, A Gun For Sale, 156.

<sup>3</sup>Collected Essays, 134.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>5</sup>Allott and Farris, The Art of Graham Greene, 78.

<sup>6</sup>Collected Essays, 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>11</sup>Greene, The Lawless Roads, 34.

<sup>12</sup>This is recounted in "The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard," contained in The Lost Childhood and Other Essays. This essay is omitted from Greene's Collected Essays.

<sup>13</sup>The Lawless Roads, 6-9.

<sup>14</sup>Greene, Journey Without Maps, 31.

<sup>15</sup>Greene, Brighton Rock, 172.

<sup>16</sup>Collected Essays, 18.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>19</sup>R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, 220.

<sup>20</sup>Greene, The Ministry of Fear, 259.

<sup>21</sup>Greene, The Confidential Agent, 163.

<sup>22</sup>The Lawless Roads, 288.



<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Brighton Rock, 235.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>31</sup> W. Gore Allen, "The World of Graham Greene," 45.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Voorhees, "The World of Graham Greene," 395.

<sup>33</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, 264.

<sup>34</sup> Greene, The Quiet American, 202.

<sup>35</sup> Greene, England Made Me, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Greene, The Lost Childhood, 173.

<sup>37</sup> Greene, A Gun For Sale, 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> Greene, The Quiet American, 211.

<sup>39</sup> Eliot, After Strange Gods, 57.

<sup>40</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, X, article "Original Sin." See also Evelyn Waugh, "Felix Culpa?", 323: "The children of Adam are not a race of noble savages who need only a divine spark to perfect them. They are aboriginally corrupt. Their tiny relative advantages of intelligence and taste and good looks and good manners are quite insignificant."

<sup>41</sup> E.W. Kemp, "Augustinianism." In E.W. Kemp, ed., Man Fallen and Free, 158. For references to Augustinianism in this and following paragraphs, I am indebted to Kemp's essay.

<sup>42</sup> Greene, The Man Within, 233.

<sup>43</sup> Brighton Rock, 187.



- <sup>44</sup> Collected Essays, 161.
- <sup>45</sup> Greene, The Power and The Glory, 179-80.
- <sup>46</sup> Henry James, The Golden Bowl, 535.
- <sup>47</sup> The Lawless Roads, 21.
- <sup>48</sup> Etienne Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine,  
152.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 154; 155.
- <sup>50</sup> The Lawless Roads, 234.
- <sup>51</sup> Journey Without Maps, 7.
- <sup>52</sup> Collected Essays, 16.
- <sup>53</sup> Journey Without Maps, 193.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 104.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 10.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., 7-8.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., 312.
- <sup>58</sup> Carolyn D. Scott, "The Witch at the Corner." In Robert Evans,  
ed., Graham Greene, 233.
- <sup>59</sup> Journey Without Maps, 234.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., 281.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 278.

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- <sup>1</sup> Journey Without Maps, 4.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 263.
- <sup>3</sup> Waugh, "Come Inside." In John A. O'Brien, ed., The Road to  
Damascus, 20.



- <sup>4</sup> Mauriac, God and Mammon, 16.
- <sup>5</sup> The Lawless Roads, 216.
- <sup>6</sup> Mauriac, Men I Hold Great, 126.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 124.
- <sup>8</sup> Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith, 65.
- <sup>9</sup> Journey Without Maps, 116.
- <sup>10</sup> The Lawless Roads, 5; 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Brighton Rock, Introduction, viii.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., viii-ix.
- <sup>13</sup> Collected Essays, 18-19.
- <sup>14</sup> Allott and Farris, 34-74.
- <sup>15</sup> Philip Stratford, Faith and Fiction, 180.
- <sup>16</sup> Greene, The Man Within, 235.
- <sup>17</sup> Greene, "La Civilization Chrétienne est-elle en péril?", 214.
- <sup>18</sup> Greene, The Name of Action, 71.
- <sup>19</sup> Greene, Rumour at Nightfall, 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Greene, Stamboul Train, 132.
- <sup>21</sup> Greene, It's A Battlefield, 159.
- <sup>22</sup> Greene, England Made Me, 103.
- <sup>23</sup> Greene, A Gun For Sale, 113.
- <sup>24</sup> Greene, The Confidential Agent, 140.
- <sup>25</sup> Greene, Our Man in Havana, 10.
- <sup>26</sup> Greene, The Comedians, 33-34.
- <sup>27</sup> Brighton Rock, 22.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 23.



- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., 61.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 206.
- <sup>31</sup> The Power and The Glory, 259.
- <sup>32</sup> A Burnt-Out Case, 10.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 134.
- <sup>34</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 11.
- <sup>35</sup> The Heart of The Matter, 12.
- <sup>36</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 76.
- <sup>37</sup> Paul Foulquie, Existentialism, 98.
- <sup>38</sup> Mauriac, Men I Hold Great, 127.
- <sup>39</sup> Reinhardt, The Theological Novel, 29.

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- <sup>1</sup> Brighton Rock, vii.
- <sup>2</sup> Allott and Farris, 147.
- <sup>3</sup> Collected Essays, 234.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Hoggart, "The Force of Caricature," 453.
- <sup>5</sup> William Birmingham, "Graham Greene Criticism: A Bibliography," 94.
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph & Harry Feldman, Dynamics of the Film, 175.
- <sup>7</sup> Birmingham, 93.
- <sup>8</sup> Collected Essays, 223.
- <sup>9</sup> Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller, 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Greene, "The Catholic Temper in Poland," 39.
- <sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 72.



<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>13</sup>Our Man in Havana, 129.

<sup>14</sup>Harper, 41.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>The Lawless Roads, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Nathan Scott, "Graham Greene: Christian Tragedian." In Evans, Graham Greene, 33.

<sup>20</sup>Nicholas Berdyaev, Dostoievsky, 87.

<sup>21</sup>Collected Essays, 18.

<sup>22</sup>Martin Buber, I and Thou, 62.

<sup>23</sup>Robert E. Wood, Martin Buber's Ontology, 81.

<sup>24</sup>Neville Braybrooke, "Graham Greene," 17.

<sup>25</sup>John Atkins, Graham Greene, 93.

<sup>26</sup>George Orwell, "The Sanctified Sinner," 62.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Beatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the Heart of the Matter,

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<sup>29</sup>Lynette Kohn, Graham Greene: The Major Novels, 5.

<sup>30</sup>Selected Essays, 421.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 427.

<sup>32</sup>Three by Flannery O'Connor, 115.

<sup>33</sup>Selected Essays, 429.

<sup>34</sup>Collected Essays, 173.



<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Péguy, Oeuvres en Prose, II, 1021.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1021-22.

<sup>39</sup> Collected Essays, 132.

<sup>40</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 155.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Pfleger, Wrestlers With Christ, 101.

<sup>42</sup> Péguy, Oeuvres Poetiques, 963.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>45</sup> Francesco Roberti and Pietro Palazzini, Dictionary of Moral Theology, 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero, 60.

<sup>47</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, 246.

<sup>48</sup> Péguy, Oeuvres en Prose, II, 221-22.

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<sup>1</sup> Joannes Dominicus Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio, xxxiii, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Pt. III, Q. 26, Art. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Pt. III, Q. 82, Art. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Suppl., Q. 36, Art. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Thompson, Poems and Essays, 107.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, Confessions, 177.

<sup>7</sup> T. Lincoln Bouscaren et al, Canon Law, 108.



<sup>8</sup> Jean Mouroux, The Meaning of Man, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Patten, "The Structure of The Power and The Glory,"  
225.

<sup>11</sup> Kohn, 32.

<sup>12</sup> See James Newman, "The Divine Pursuit," 33: "The action leading up to the priest's death is purposely suggestive of the events before the crucifixion: the temptation to go on to Las Casas might be Christ's temptation in the desert, the mestizo betrayer might be Judas, the agony in the cell block, Gethsemane."

<sup>13</sup> The Lawless Roads, 199-200.

<sup>14</sup> Patten, 229.

<sup>15</sup> du Parc, 375.

<sup>16</sup> David Lodge, Graham Greene, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Bouscaren, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 113-14.

<sup>22</sup> Summa, Pt. III, Q. 64, Art. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Pt. III, Q. 64, Art. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Mauriac, Men I Hold Great, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Kunkel, The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene, 134.

<sup>26</sup> See Canon George Smith, ed., The Teaching of the Catholic Church, I, 584 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Gustav Herling, "Two Sanctities: Greene and Camus," 12.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Teaching of the Catholic Church, I, 333 ff.



<sup>29</sup> David H. Hesla, "Theological Ambiguity in the 'Catholic Novels,'" In Evans, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Summa, Pt. II-II, Q. 124, Art. 1.

<sup>31</sup> de Pange, Graham Greene, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Summa, Pt. III, Q. 68, Art. 2.

## CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup> "What Price Pity?", Time (August 9, 1948), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Allott and Farris, 223.

<sup>3</sup> Donat O'Donnell, Maria Cross, 64.

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Waugh, "Felix Culpa," 323.

<sup>5</sup> Victor de Pange, 63-64.

<sup>6</sup> W.H. Auden, "A Note on Graham Greene," 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 263.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29. In the same book, Mr. Prentice, the Scotland Yard man, observes to Rowe: "Pity is a terrible thing. People talk about the passion of love. Pity is the worst passion of all: we don't outlive it like sex" (206).

<sup>11</sup> O'Donnell, 86.

<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Dieu Vivant, XVI, 131.

<sup>14</sup> Allott and Farris, 214-15.

<sup>15</sup> In Evans, 40.

<sup>16</sup> O'Donnell, 83.



- <sup>17</sup> David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene, 78.
- <sup>18</sup> Lodge, 29.
- <sup>19</sup> "A God-Smitten Man," 9.
- <sup>20</sup> "Greene and Catholicism," Newsweek, (July 12, 1948), 85.
- <sup>21</sup> Allott and Farris, 229.
- <sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Fear, 223.
- <sup>23</sup> Kathleen Nott, The Emperor's Clothes, 310.
- <sup>24</sup> Marcel More, "The Two Holocausts of Scobie," 48.
- <sup>25</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, I, 151. Article "Adultery."
- <sup>26</sup> Smith, Teaching of the Catholic Church, I, 649.
- <sup>27</sup> Summa, Pt. II-II, Q. 21, Art. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., Pt. II-II, Q. 21, Art. 4.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., Pt. II-II, Q. 21, Art. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> New Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII, 782. Article "Suicide."
- <sup>32</sup> Evelyn Waugh, "Felix Culpa?", 325.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 325-26.
- <sup>34</sup> Summa, Pt. II-II, Q. 186, Art. 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., Pt. II-II, Q. 186, Art. 7.
- <sup>36</sup> "Lettre de Graham Greene," Dieu Vivant, XVIII, 151-52.
- <sup>37</sup> "West African Rock," Times Literary Supplement (29 May, 1948), 302.
- <sup>38</sup> "Lettre de Graham Greene," 152.
- <sup>39</sup> Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, 135.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 349.



<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Collected Essays, 119.

<sup>43</sup>Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, II, 174-75.

<sup>44</sup>George Orwell, "The Sanctified Sinner," 62.

<sup>45</sup>O'Faolain, 62.

<sup>46</sup>Martin Turnell, Graham Greene, 31.

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<sup>1</sup>Graham Greene, The End of The Affair, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction." In Robert M. Davis, ed., The Novel, 159.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Surmelian, Techniques of Fiction Writing, 67.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Allen, "Awareness of Evil," 344.

<sup>6</sup>T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 427.

<sup>7</sup>Louise Bogan, "Good Beyond Evil," 29-30.

<sup>8</sup>Kathleen Nott, The Emperor's Clothes, 310.

<sup>9</sup>François Mauriac, God and Mammon, 59-60.

<sup>10</sup>Eliot, Selected Essays, 253.

<sup>11</sup>See Geoffrey Clive, The Romantic Enlightenment, 142-48.

<sup>12</sup>Mauriac, God and Mammon, 60.

<sup>13</sup>Augustine, Confessions, 3.

<sup>14</sup>St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night, 143-44.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 197.



<sup>16</sup> Douglas Stewart, The Ark of God, 89.

<sup>17</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Regis Jolivet, Introduction to Kierkegaard, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Mauriac, God and Mammon, 74.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>23</sup> St. John, The Dark Night, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Mauriac, God and Mammon, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Waugh, "The Heart's Own Reasons," 459.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Summa, Pt. I, Q. 76, Art. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Harold Gardiner, In All Conscience, 102.

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<sup>1</sup> F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, 3; 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>3</sup> Collected Essays, 90.

<sup>4</sup> A.A. de Vitis, Graham Greene, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Scott, "Catholic Novelist's Dilemma," 901.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Seward, "Graham Greene," 83.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony T. Bouscaren, "France and Graham Greene versus America and Diem," 414-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Freedman, "Novel of Contention," 77.



<sup>9</sup> The Quiet American, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Riley E. Hughes, "The Quiet American: The Case Reopened,"  
41.

<sup>11</sup> John O. McCormick, "The Rough and Lurid Vision: Henry James, Graham Greene and the International Theme," 160.

<sup>12</sup> R.O. Evans, "Existentialism in . . . The Quiet American,"  
241-48.

<sup>13</sup> Hector Hawton, The Feast of Unreason, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 166.

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<sup>1</sup> Greene, In Search of A Character, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> A Burnt-Out Case, 6.

<sup>7</sup> James Joyce, Portrait of The Artist, 240.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Kermode, Puzzles and Epiphanies, 178.

<sup>9</sup> Albert J. Nevins, ed., Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary, 595.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, 119.

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<sup>1</sup> Greene, "The Middle-brow Film," 304.

<sup>2</sup> Summa, Pt. III, Q. 73, Art. 3.



<sup>3</sup> The Potting Shed, 95.

<sup>4</sup> John J. McLaughlin, "The Potting Shed and the Potter's Wheel," 169.

<sup>5</sup> See Henry Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 254.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas A. Wassmer, "Graham Greene: Literary Artist and Philosopher Theologian," 585.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Attwater, ed., A Catholic Dictionary, 33.

<sup>8</sup> St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>11</sup> John P. Murphy, "The Potting Shed," 47.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Teaching of the Catholic Church, I, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Summa, Pt. I, Q. 105, Art. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Pt. II-II, Q. 178, Art. 1.

<sup>17</sup> "Graham Greene, A Spiritual Suspense Story," Life, (April 1, 1957), 68.

<sup>18</sup> Murphy, "The Potting Shed," 48.

<sup>19</sup> In A Sense of Reality, 77-96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The Living Room, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, Teaching of the Catholic Church, II, 1063-65.



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<sup>1</sup>Vida E. Markovic, The Changing Face, 82.

<sup>2</sup>Hesla, in Evans, 101.

<sup>3</sup>"On Literary Criticism," 534.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Henry Hewes, "Resurrection Will Out," 27.

<sup>6</sup>John P. Murphy, "The Potting Shed," 45.

<sup>7</sup>Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, 171.

<sup>8</sup>The Power and The Glory, 129.

<sup>9</sup>Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine, 217-18.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>11</sup>Mary McCarthy, "Sheep in Wolves' Clothing," 271.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 274.

<sup>13</sup>Dietrich von Hildebrand, True Morality and Its Counterfeits,

95.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Shuttleworth and Simon Raven, "The Art of Fiction III: Graham Greene," 24.

<sup>15</sup>Philip Stratford, "One Meeting With Mauriac," 618.

<sup>16</sup>Von Hildebrand, 3.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted by Von Hildebrand, 112.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Time (October 29, 1951), 103.

<sup>19</sup>Francis Connolly, "Inside Modern Man," 21.

<sup>20</sup>Contained in Twenty-one Stories, 217-24.

<sup>21</sup>Bouscaren, 392: "An indulgence for the living cannot be applied to any other living person than the one who gains it (C. 930)."



<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of this point, see Elizabeth Sewell, "The Imagination of Graham Greene," 12-21.

Apropos of Greene's literary poses and his thirst after sensations, two poems from his book of verse, Babbling April, may well be relevant. In "The Gamble," he writes of his suicide attempts:

I slip a charge into one chamber,  
Out of six,  
Then move the chambers round.  
One cast of the dice for death,  
And five for life.  
Then, eyes blind and fingers trembling,  
Place the revolver to my head,  
And pull the trigger.  
Will it be mist and death  
At the bend of this sunset road,  
Or life reinforced  
By the propinquity of death?  
Either is a gain.

It is a gamble which I cannot lose.

But in another poem, "Sensations," is to be found the following:

How we make our timorous advances to death, by  
pulling the trigger of a revolver, which we already  
know to be empty.

Even as I do now.

And how horrified I should be, I who love Death in  
my verse, if I had forgotten

To unload.

If the second poem also is autobiographical, then Greene's attempted suicides may simply be another dodge of the poseur.

<sup>23</sup> The Lawless Roads, 72.



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